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ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1906, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.*

No. 133 NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 3, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S NIGHT WRANGLERS

or What happened to Stella

The coil of Bud's whirling rope settled squarely upon the great gaunt leader. As the noose tightened, the beast was sent into the air over the heads of its mates.

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4

72
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85

247

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King of the Wild West's Night Wrangler;

OR,

What Happened to Stella.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARNSTORMER.

A cloud of dust and a mighty bellowing both rose above the high fence surrounding the cattle chutes where the Valley Ranch was wont to ship its beef. There likewise rose language which, if overheard by the recording angel—cowboys believe that that Celestial being stuffs his ears with cotton when they are shipping stock—would surely have told sadly against Bud Morgan—otherwise "Goldilocks."

The perspiration was streaming down Bud's face, his long hair was tumbled in his eyes, he had a smudge of dirt across his cheek, and his jumper was torn. He was endeavoring the impossible, was Bud, and just because he knew it was impossible he kept bitterly at the task.

For no one man can make a Hereford bull go into a box-car when he is minded not to, and Bud could have called the big beast every name in the category without making a bit of difference.

It was the last of the bunch of cattle that Ted Strong had sold to old Nick Botts up in Montana, and, as the day was growing late and the rest of the boys wanted to get back to the ranch, Bud—who was the sole person accompanying the shipment to its destination—told Clay and the rest of them to "get along home! I don't need you 'ombres to get these last few in the kyars."

But he had reckoned without the bull. The cows went in, and as meek as lambs. The bull continued to cavort about the enclosure and play the very dickens with Bud's temper.

And right in the middle of this circus a face that reminded Bud of a death's head, hollow of cheek and with chin of that greenish hue which denotes years of close shavings, appeared above the fence.

A much dented "plug" hat was above the face; a frayed linen collar and flaring red bow, with polka-dot spots of white, was below it. That was all Bud saw—just the head of the stranger.

And behold, a voice came out of the head, remarking placidly:

"Why don't you twist that cow's tail, mister? I've seen it done oft and again to make a refractory bovine go."

Bud stopped stock still and glared. But whether rage or amazement should first be his master was for some moments a doubtful question.

Finally he burst out with:

"*Cow!* Oh, suffering sand-snipes! That cow, gentle stranger, is of the female persuasion."

"I would suggest that it needed persuasion of almost any kind," said the man over the fence.

Bud looked around for his "Lucy" gun. But in the strenuousness of his recent labor he had laid aside pistol

and cartridge-belt, and now he was too mad to remember where he had put them.

Meanwhile the face rose higher. Beside the frayed collar and the wonderful tie, there was a long neck with a prominent Adam's apple connecting the head with a pair of shoulders clothed in shabby and shiny black. This black garment proved to be a frock coat of ancient vintage, when the man had climbed up and "humped" himself over on the top rail of the fence.

Beneath the skirts of the coat appeared a pair of decrepit gray trousers, frayed at the bottoms, and decorated, as was the coat, with varied spots of grease. His shoes were not mates.

Bud Morgan's wrath gradually cooled as he inventoried the man's outfit. It was a wonderful display, and he finally came over to the fence to examine it and the man inside it, more closely, while the Hereford took a much needed rest.

"Brother," said the cow-puncher grimly, "d'yuh know what yuh make me think of roostin' up there an' givin' me uncalled-for advice? Yuh look like this yuh crow-bird the poetry cuss talked about—th' one that squatted 'jest above his chamber door—quoth th' crow-bird, 'Never ag'in!' Yuh know th' chap I mean?"

"Ah! you recall to my mind that wonderful poem by Poe—'The Raven.'"

"He was, I reckon," admitted Bud, shaking his head thoughtfully.

"Was what?" asked the other, in some astonishment.

"Raving when he wrote it," said Bud gravely. "I've seen a lot of birds, an' they never talked like men; but I've seen a lot of men that were birds, all right! An' the feller that wrote about that crow was shore a bird!

"Howsomever, the critter must ha' been jes' erbout as much use as you be. Instead o' sittin' up thar an' givin' advice, why don't yuh come down an' help? Say! d'yuh want a job?"

"Why—er—it is true, I am resting at present," admitted the man with the plug hat.

"I should say yuh were!" exclaimed Bud. "An' restin' too derned comferble up thar."

"You mistake my meaning, friend. 'Resting' is a term we use in our profession denoting the time elapsing between engagements."

"Huh?" exclaimed Bud, staring. Then he gave it up, and added: "Well, is anything doing? You seem to be foot-loose and if you're goin' West on this bunch o' junk they call a railroad, I'll feed yuh an' transport yuh if yuh'll help with th' watering and sich."

"I was not honestly going in that direction," said the man slowly.

"Thunder! Well, come erlong *dis*-honestly, if so be yuh must."

"You mistake my meaning, sir. I wished to convey the impression that I had not been headed West when fortunate chance placed me here upon this topmost rail."

"Jumping sand-hills!" exclaimed Bud, at last unable to contain his pent-up feelings. "What'd I give tuh have Jack Slate hear you sling langwidge! Bawston would die of envy, that's what would happen tuh him!"

The other eyed him mildly. "I seem to amuse you, friend?" he said.

"So much so that I'll add a dollar to that tremendous offer I jest made yuh. I'll feed yuh clear tuh Montana if yuh'll go erlong."

"Is that where your ranch is situated?"

"Nop. I belong to the Moon Valley outfit. Moon Valley's back over yon," and Bud indicated the direction with his thumb jerked over his shoulder.

"Ah! you offer me only a short engagement, then," sighed the stranger. "It has been long, I must admit, since I fell heir to a bona-fide forty-week contract."

"Yuh don't look like yuh'd ever worked much," declared Bud, puzzled.

"My dear sir! I believe I have more one-night stands to my credit than any other man in the profession. That is why I long so for a continued engagement."

"Want a reg'lar job, do yuh?"

"You put the matter crudely; but it is the truth. I desire an unlimited engagement with a desire that passeth the understanding of the ordinary mortal."

"Yuh want a steady job?"

"That sounds coarse; but 'tis the truth!"

"I dunno," said Bud, who was nothing if not good-hearted. "Yuh don't size up tuh me as bein' much good——"

"Good!" cried the other. "Man! man! You should see some of my press notices. Why, the way I knocked 'em in Kankakee——"

"Huh?" grunted Bud. "What kind of a knocker air yuh?"

The other sighed and came down to earth again—figuratively speaking, for he still roosted on the rail.

"We are at cross purposes," he said. "It matters not. Let us to business. Although I was not at the moment traveling West, the prospect of eating again would toll me to the very gates of Hades, sir——"

"That's doin' purty well," grinned Bud. "We'll likely git tuh Helena"—accent on the first syllable.

"I will go with you, sir!" declared the plug-hat man decisively. "And do we eat soon?"

"Help me tuh git this pesky son-of-a-gun intuh the kyar an' we'll go down tuh Paddy's an' fill up with tuck before th' train comes that's tuh pick up these cars."

CHAPTER II.

THE TALES OF A TRAVELER.

They didn't twist that Hereford's tail, but they got him into the car all right. Then, true to his word, Bud took the new chum over to Paddy's for a "fill-up."

The man's dignified angularity, his monotonous tone of voice, and the "latitude and longitude" of his language, interested the long-haired cow-puncher immensely.

"If yuh don't mind, mister," said Bud, "I'd like tuh have some kind of a handle tuh lay hold of when I'm speakin' tuh yuh."

"Oh, my name?"

"Yep. And what your biz is—for yuh don't look jes' like a 'bo."

"Sir!" exclaimed the other, drawing himself up and looking tragic, "I should consider that suggestion an insult, were it not that I have read your good heart, and know that it was merely a tactless remark on your part."

"Shore!" Bud hastened to say. "I wouldn't hurt yuh feelings for the world. But what *air* yuh?"

"Sir, by profession I belong in the ranks of Thespians."

"Yuh don't say!"

"My father and mother were likewise connected with the profession."

"Well, well!" muttered the puzzled cowboy. "Yuh

shore have made it as clear as mud. What air these Thespians?"

"Professionals, sir! Actors!"

"Oh! yuh a barnstormer!" exclaimed Bud, with relief. "Why didn't yuh say so? I do wish," he added complainingly, "that folks 'ud use English so's a feller kin understand what they're drivin' at."

The actor ignored this remark, but said:

"Sir, among gentlemen an interchange of courtesies is usually considered quite proper. Sorry I have no card, but my name is Junius Brutus Hamilton Fogg."

"Zip!" exclaimed Bud. "All that? It ends like the snapper of a cart-whip. Well! I'm Bud Morgan—known far and near by jest them two ornery names. My parents neglected tuh supply me with any more."

"I am sure you are better than you would appear, Mr. Morgan," said Fogg. "And I'm glad to meet you."

"Oh, I'm a singed cat, all right," said the cow-puncher. "And yuh kin call me Bud. I'm more useter it. As for that double-j'inted name of yours, mister, I shore got ter shorten it. I'll call yuh 'Ham' for short."

"Eh?" exclaimed Fogg, turning to look at him suspiciously.

But Bud's face was as serious as the grave, and the actor believed that the cow-puncher was quite as innocent as he appeared.

And, although Bud might have been "joshing" him a good bit, he did the right thing by Fogg when they came to Paddy's. Paddy's wife was a buxom, if no longer blooming, lady from the Ould Sod, and she could cook pork and corn bread "tuh beat th' band," as Bud declared.

"Yuh see this long, lank, cadaverous lookin' 'ombre?" said the cow-puncher to the Irishwoman. "Well, missus, just see how much he'll hold, will yuh? I'll settle."

And Fogg needed no urging. Bud was soon satisfied himself; then he sat back and eyed the actor, who seemed visibly to swell with wonder.

"D'yuh know," Bud said solemnly, "yuh remind me of one o' these hare boy-constructors"—Bud meant "boa-constrictors"—"'t they showed me at th' Chicager fair-grounds. He was a snake, he was! They say he'd swaller a ha'f growed steer, all but his horns, an' then wait till th' horns dropped off b'fore downin' th' last mouthful. Say, Ham, d'yuh allus feed so hearty? For, if so, I better go an' lay in more pervisions than I've got back thar in the car."

"Wonder not, my friend," quoth Fogg. "This is the first occasion of plentitude I have experienced for many days."

"Well!" exclaimed Bud, picking his teeth. "It shore is a pleasure tuh see yuh eat, an' a pleasure tuh hear yuh talk. I misdoubt me I'm payin' too little for the pleasure of yuh comp'ny tuh Montany. I hereby raise yuh wages another dollar."

"I sincerely thank you, Mr. Morgan——"

"Now, don't do that!" cried Bud despairingly.

"Why do you so object to your rightful appellation?"

"Heh? Oh, my name yuh mean?"

"Yes."

"Why, it's like this yere. I'm allus expectin' th' feller that calls me by my full entitlements is goin' tuh add: 'Played th' organ, his father beat th' drum,' etcetery. An' when a man does thiat air tuh me, it's a deadly insult an' I'm bound tuh turn loose on him!"

"Oh, I assure you!" cried Fogg, holding up both hands—one with a fork in it with a mouthful of pork on the end—"that such was never my thought or intention."

"All right. No offense. But just call me plain 'Bud,' and go on with your spiel."

"Why, I was about to observe before your interruption, that I am thankful to you, but I wish that the engagement you offer would be permanent."

"No yuh don't. Yuh wouldn't wanter ride up an' down with cattle for th' rest of the season, Ham—not by a jugful!"

"No; perhaps not. But on this ranch you speak of, where you work?"

"Bless yuh heart, Ham! we ain't got no theatrical troup out thar—though some of th' boys is reg'lar cut-ups."

"But there must be other work?"

"Why, I dunno of anything open jest now," Bud declared, "exceptin' that Ted Strong is lookin' for a night wrangler——"

"Wrangler?" repeated Fogg. "Ah! why would that not be my chance? I am English by birth, sir, and have had a university training. I, sir, was senior wrangler of my class at St. Botolph's, Oxford. The mathematical tripos were my forte, sir!"

"Jumping sand-hills!" gasped Bud. "All that? yuh don't look it."

"True. I have descended in the social scale. Perhaps I may rise again."

"Not if yuh tuck erway much more of Mother Roach's grub," declared Bud. "Yuh'll be anchored here. Come erlong; let's make a break for the train."

But he was evidently somewhat puzzled, and kept glancing at Fogg curiously all the way back. Finally Bud came out with what was in his mind:

"I tell yuh what, Ham, by th' look o' yuh, I wouldn't think yuh knowed th' first livin' thing erbout hosses."

"Horses?"

"Yep."

"Did I say anything about equines?" demanded Fogg, likewise puzzled.

"Heh? Come again!"

"I did not mention horses," repeated the broken-down actor.

"Which you shore did say yuh was a great wrangler. An', if so, p'raps Ted would take yuh on."

"But my dear mister——"

"Hold hard!" warned Bud.

"Mr. Bud! I was senior wrangler at St. Botolph's——"

"Livery-stable, or ranch? It might be either by the sound," interposed Bud.

Fogg was horrified.

"St. Botolph's is one of the famous colleges of Oxford, England."

"Shucks! Whad yuh do with hosses there?"

"Not a thing, sir!" exclaimed Fogg, in some exasperation.

"But yuh said——"

"I plainly see that we are at cross purposes again," sighed Fogg. "'Wrangler' means a disputant—especially in higher mathematics. I stood at the head of my class in such studies."

"Oh, great snakes!" gasped Bud. "An' all th' time I thought yuh was claimin' tuh be a shore 'nough hawse wrangler. That's what Ted Strong wants—a night wrangler. A feller tuh handle the hosses for the crew at night.

"He's shore got tuh be a dis—dispu—— What was that word yuh slung, Ham?"

"Disputant?" suggested Fogg, wincing again at the abbreviation of his proper name.

"That's it! He's shore got tuh be a disputacious cuss tuh handle hosses. A hawse is nigh as fool-headed as a meuel, an' has tuh be talked tuh by a feller with a gift er eloquence—now I tell yuh!"

"So 'night wrangler' means a hostler, Mister—er—Bud?"

"Suthin' like that."

"My word! how queer," said the actor drearily. "Another hope deserts me. Ah, me!"

"Oh, don't yuh take on, old feller!" said Bud encouragingly. "Jest open up yuh heart tuh me, an' mebbe we kin find a way out of yuh misery."

CHAPTER III.

HARD LUCK.

There was the whistle of the coming freight in the distance when Bud and his new friend got back to the cars. Bud made the final rounds, saw that all was right, and then the freight halted at the tank for the engine to take water, and the crew afterward coupled on the cattle-cars on the siding.

Bud and Fogg established themselves in the horse-car, where the cow-puncher had an extra mount for emergencies. He expected to pick up two or three husky fellows at the end of the run to help drive the herd on to the Three Finger Ranch.

After the train was under way, and they sat propped up against the alfalfa that had been stowed in this car for the horses and cattle during the tedious run, Bud allowed his curiosity to have sway again.

"Josh Durkin oughter meet you," he said. "He used tuh spout tuh us 'ombres till we was plagued near hangin' him, one while. He re'lly thought he was cut out for another Booth."

"Ah!" said Fogg, with curling lip. "He was an amateur?"

"Well, yuh couldn't call him a perfessional—like yuh-self, for instance," which gentle sarcasm was quite lost on Junius Brutus Hamilton Fogg.

"The ranks of the profession are being overcrowded by amateurs—graduates from so-called dramatic schools, and such," said Fogg loftily. "It is this fact which, more than aught else, sir, is the cause of my present eclipse."

"Now, that's too derned bad," said Bud soothingly, but encouraging further confidences.

"As I told you, sir," began Fogg, "my parents were of the profession, too. They were English actors—in the provinces. My father was a Shakespearian student of some—er—renown. My mother was not playing when I was born. She had unfortunately become too stout, and only went on in mob scenes and in those scenes where the 'merry villagers' appear. She was, in fact, during the latter part of her life, a wardrobe woman."

This fall from great eminence impressed Bud very little, for he didn't understand the social strata of the Thespian world. Nevertheless, he looked wise and nodded.

"Naturally my parents could not have given me the education which I obtained as I grew up."

"They couldn't send yuh tuh this St. Bobsworth, yuh mean?"

"St. Botolph—yes. Or, to the preparatory schools. But, as it chanced, my father's brother was a wealthy man. He was—ahem! well, the family seldom spoke of it, you understand, but he really made his money in soap-making," and the statement was scarcely above a whisper.

"No!" exclaimed Bud.

"It is a fact, sir."

"Why, that's a shame!" grunted Bud. "Lucky my folks never got intuh such a common trade. I sh'd ha' left 'em."

Fogg looked queerly at him, but got on with his story.

"My uncle seemed to take an interest in me when I was small. He found us at one time when my father had been playing at a small theater on the outskirts of London, and the company had disbanded, putting both of them out of an engagement."

"Bein' out of a job seems tuh run in your family—like wooden laigs," suggested Bud solemnly.

"Ah! it is an uncertain profession at best," admitted Fogg.

"Tough luck. Go ahead, Hammy, old boy!"

"To hasten. My uncle offered to take me up and give me schooling. My mother and father would not stand in my light—especially as the soap-boiler offered them a small annuity—a beggarly sum, bah Jove!—just for the pleasure of 'trying me out.'"

"Humph! He paid for the chance of educating you, eh?" asked Bud thoughtfully.

"Well, he was a man who was crazy to make bally experiments, don't you know," said Fogg. "He wanted, as he said afterward, to see if what was in the blood would come out."

"Ahem! in the maternal, or the paternal strain?" asked Bud solemnly.

"Er—he didn't say," returned Fogg puzzled. "However, he had the best of my young life, sir—the best of it!"

"Oh, he did?"

"Yes, sir. He did his best to wean me from my parents. A most despicable attempt. But I am proud to say, sir, that it failed!" exclaimed Fogg, rising and smiting his breast.

Then the car pitched suddenly, and he sat down in a hurry.

"Yuh went back to th' play-actors, did yuh?" asked Bud, still thoughtful.

"I had the blood of the profession in me. I had drawn in the spirit of it with my mother's milk. Yes, sir! He could not pervert my mind."

"The soap-boiler?"

"Yes, my uncle."

"And so you became a barnstormer?" said Bud dryly.

"Judge me not by my present situation, sir," said Fogg loftily. "It was not ever thus."

"No!"

"I, indeed, surpassed my worthy father in the portrayal of Shakespearian characters. After his demise—my mother, good lady, had unfortunately passed to that bourne from which there is no return, some years before—I chanced to join a company coming to America to play.

"In New York I was not known," declared Fogg, with a smirk. "I played in many of the larger cities. Why,

my *Brutus*, my *Hamlet*, my *Iago*, was the talk of the towns which had been fortunate enough to behold them."

"Er-huh?" grunted Bud densely. "I guess yuh got me foozled thar, partner. What air them things?"

Anybody who knew Goldilocks would have seen the twinkle in his off eye; but Fogg really believed the cowboy was quite as ignorant as he appeared.

"My dear man!" he exclaimed, aghast. "Those are three of Shakespeare's most famous characters."

"No!"

"Well, finally, in an evil day," pursued the actor sadly, "I was urged to join a company journeying through the Southwest. And, business not being of the best on this side of the border, we ventured into Mexico.

"There we found our Waterloo."

"Shucks! Where'd yuh lose her?"

"What's that?" demanded Fogg, eying him doubtfully.

"That gal? Yuh didn't say nothin' erbout losin' her, did yuh?"

"Losing who?" exclaimed the actor.

"That Lulu gal yuh jest spoke of."

"I didn't speak of any girl, my friend."

"Say!" exclaimed Bud, in apparent excitement. "Am I dippy, or be you?"

"I—don't—understand—you?" murmured the puzzled Thespian.

"You shore said something about finding her."

"Oh!" cried Fogg, the dawn breaking in his mind at length. "No, no! you mistake me. I said we found our Waterloo."

"That's it! Funny name. Cart b'fore th' hawse, ain't it? Yuh mean Loo Waters? I knowed a gal down on the Pecos named Waters——"

"My dear friend!" gasped Fogg, laying his hand upon Bud's arm beseechingly. "I fail to make myself plain in using metaphors. I will endeavor to speak more simply."

"Huh?"

"Waterloo was a famous battle. It closed the career of the great Napoleon. We met our Waterloo in the City of Mexico."

"Oh! I see! Yuh busted?"

"Succinctly put. Yes, sir, we burst up."

"Tough luck, Ham," said Bud, nodding understandingly.

"Suffice to say," continued Fogg, "those of the party who had money used it to get back to what they called 'God's country'—meaning, in fact, the States."

"Don't wonder," muttered Bud. "I've been to Mexico myself."

"Unfortunately I had not sufficient means. I remained. I strained my credit. I was in arrears to a Mexican woman for my board—rawther a nasty creature. It was deucedly unpleasant," said Fogg ruminatively.

"Them señoritas ain't all they're cracked up tuh be."

"Ugh! She was long past the señorita age," explained Fogg. "And she wanted to marry me."

"Sort of 'any port in a storm,' eh?" grinned Bud.

But this passed over the unconscious barnstormer's head.

"However," pursued Fogg, "I fell in with an American. He had been a manager in the States. He had a company—not a first-class aggregation like the one with which I had been," explained Fogg. "But it was no time for a man to be squeamish. It was sort of a vaudeville company. He offered me rawther a good chance to go with him down through the Spanish-Americas. He assured me there was money in it. How he knew, I did not ask. Later I found that he was a rawther visionary man," sighed Fogg.

"There was a magician in the troupe, a couple of girls who did a 'sister act,' a comedian and his wife—rawther a pretty lady, she was—this Abel Jackford, the manager who did almost any kind of a specialty you could name, a couple of musical mokes, and myself. I, sir, was billed to recite the words of the Immortal Bard——"

"Huh? Thar yuh go ag'in!" exclaimed Bud. "He's another feller yuh ain't rung in b'fore."

"I mean Shakespeare."

"Oh! Th' same 'ombre yuh was speakin' of b'fore. Well. Go on."

"We started from Mexico City one day in April," said Fogg, in his monotonous voice, bound for Guatemala. We were told that the railroad had been completed to the Port of Salima Cruz, so we started by rail. Ah! that was a journey. I do not believe the roadbed had been balasted at all. It was like riding over plowed ground—and very badly plowed at that.

"Well, we got to the Colorado River, and there we found the engineers just constructing the bridge. We were sixty miles from Tehuantepec, where we could next take train, and were dumped out on the river-bank with ten tons of baggage, not to speak of the small live stock that the magician carried for his act, and the soubrettes' dogs!

"We had to take barges—such as I guess Montezuma might have used when Cortez came over—to get to the other completed part of the railroad. And we got stuck on a sandbar for four days and 'most starved to death. When we finally reached the little station of San Juan Evangelista we were pretty near done up, and the girls slept for two days.

"That, my dear sir, was an easy one," groaned Fogg. "I should have turned about and come back, then and there. But, instead of realizing that our hard experiences had just begun, I was encouraged to believe by the manager that they were practically ended.

"But in those three years that we were out we traveled from Mexico down into southern Chile, up into Bolivia, across a thousand miles of barren plateau on mule back, camping out in the open very frequently, down the Rio de la Plata, up the coast of Brazil, a thousand miles on the Amazon to Manaos, up along the east coast, stopping at the Columbian and Venezuelan ports, finally being dumped at Galveston—a city that isn't half-built and that hasn't a dollar to spend on the theater.

"Sir, I tell you, it was awful! Talk about one-night stands! Why some of our places of performance were days apart! And the places in which we showed!

"Why, in one place we tore the partitions out of a hotel dining-room, and in another hired the jail for the show, being obliged to allow the warden and his three prisoners to see it free of charge! My word! it was hard lines."

"Yuh air shore right there, brother," admitted Bud commiseratingly. "Didn't yuh make good nowheres?"

"'Make good?' I should say we did! Why, we took some of the towns by storm! And then," added Fogg, his voice dropping to its melancholy key, "some of the towns took us. I remember one place in Chile—Pisagua. It hadn't rained there for seventeen years. A man couldn't expect to avoid trouble in a place like that. We all got arrested, and it cost our manager about five hundred to get us clear. It seems he desecrated the town

cathedral by pasting showbills on the rear wall of it—not knowing what manner of building it was—and the authorities took us all in.

"But what's the use of continuing?" groaned Fogg. "When we disbanded at Galveston that man owed me so much that it makes me nervous even now to think of it.

"And I'd been out of the country so long that I had lost my standing with the agents and managers. Besides, I have been quite unable to get to New York, don't you know——"

He broke off abruptly in his tale of woe. It had grown dark while he talked, and the freight had been running quite rapidly. Suddenly the brakes were put on, and it ground to an abrupt stop—so abruptly that Bud and his companion were flung together into a corner.

"Jumping sand-hills! what's this?" cried the cow-puncher, who, to tell the truth, had been half-asleep during the latter part of Fogg's recital.

He jumped up and flung wide open the side door of the car.

"Come on, Ham!" he exclaimed. "Let's see what this is. Mebbe it's a hold-up."

"Train-robbers!" gasped Fogg.

"Yep. Mebbe they wantuh milk my cows," and Bud leaped out with a laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WILD DOGS.

The train crew had mostly run up ahead, and the cowboy and his companion hurried likewise in that direction. As they ran Bud stumbled over something and went down on his hands and knees.

"Hang take that jack!" shouted the angry cowboy, clambering to his feet.

There was a great scurrying and drumming of feet off in the darkness. Bud grabbed out his gun and spat six shots in rapid succession at the scarcely discernible figures.

"What are they? What's the matter?" panted Fogg, seizing the cowboy's arm in a tremor of apprehension.

"Them's jackass rabbits," growled Bud. "Erbout as much good as so many bedbugs—an' I dunno a more ornery an' useless shellfish than a bedbug! Thar they go ag'in!"

Another troop of thumping creatures—just a scattering mass of low, moving objects, tore past the train. As the cowboy and his companion went up forward they fell over dead jack-rabbits all along the length of the train.

"I tell yuh what!" exclaimed Bud; "I've seen er jackass rabbit drive, down on the Pecos, that was er wonder; but this yere beats my time!"

And it amazed everybody else, too. Thousands of the animals had been steadily plowing their way across the railroad tracks. The headlight had dazzled them, and the foolish creatures had piled up in front of the pilot, permitting themselves to be killed by the hundreds, their bodies actually impeding the progress of the engine.

"Yuh see," said Bud, as they went back to their car, the circus being over and the engineer being ready to start again; "yuh see, it's been a turrible dry season an' this has made food scurce. These rabbits come up tuh th' railroad-line o' nights lookin' for grub.

"But this is th' first time I ever heard o' a passel of 'em holdin' up a train. They'd oughter stopped th' limited an' gone through th' passengers' pockets," and he chuckled.

"I've hearn tell of Kansas grasshoppers gittin' on th' rails so noomerous that they greased 'em an' th' trains had tuh stop; an' locusts hev likewise delayed traffic in the same way. But this yere hold-up by jack-rabbits beats a royal flush—it shore do!"

The two days run before the string of cattle-cars was sidetracked at Dollar Station passed quite uneventfully for the cowboy and his new acquaintance; but Bud enjoyed himself hugely "joshing" the barnstormer. Fogg awoke only gradually to the fact that he had misunderstood Bud. Perhaps the long-haired cattleman wasn't so ignorant and guileless as he appeared. But he felt diffident, just the same, about asking Bud not to call him "Ham" so frequently.

On the other hand, Bud learned that the barnstormer wasn't a bad fellow at heart. He was inordinately puffed up with pride over his own achievements, and talked eternally of himself and how he "had knocked 'em" in this and that town; but he was a willing worker and grateful to a degree.

"He don't booze, he's clean-mouthed, he keeps himself personally clean if he is ragged, and what more a feller can do when he's down on his luck th' way he is, I dunno," thought Goldilocks to himself. "Mebbe Ted could break him in. By jings, I'll chance it!"

So to the ex-actor he said, as they pulled into Dollar Station:

"You come along o' me an' learn tuh prod cows. I've got ter drive these yere critters clean up intuh th' Bitter Root country. Can yuh cook?"

"I'll make a dab at it," declared Fogg, willing enough.

"All right. Yuh kin go as cook an' gineral utility, at forty a month an' found. Then I'll pay yuh fare back tuh Moon Valley, if yuh wanter go, an' see what Ted Strong says erbout yuh. Ted's great on takin' in queer characters an' makin' somethin' of 'em."

"I like that!" exclaimed Fogg. "What is there queer about me?"

"Your name, Ham—your name!" grunted Bud. "Such a name as you tote around would queer a man most anywheres—yuh hear me!"

Si Fosdick, the station-agent at Dollar, welcomed Bud warmly, inquiring—as did his wife—after Stella and Mrs. Walter Graham. But the cow-puncher and his assistant put up at the Long Reach Hotel.

There Bud secured two fellows to help drive the bunch of cattle up to the Three Finger Ranch, and in the morning they got the cattle into the corral. But Bud allowed them to rest for twenty-four hours before starting on the march. He wanted to deliver the herd in good condition.

"And ye wanter watch aout for th' wolves, Bud," drawled Si Fosdick. "Them pesky critters is gittin' thicker'n thicker of late. Joe Wemmick, that lives over north o' here, has got 'n' tamed one—ez though there want enough of th' critters eround without that."

"Tamed a wolf!" exclaimed Bud.

"Yep. Got him an' two others out of a litter o' pups and brought him up by hand. He's as tame as a dawg. Ye kin pat him, an' he seems re'l friendly. And his coat's as sleek as a collie's."

"That's a good burn, Si."

"No, no! I ain't joshin' ye. An', by cripes! a feller

come in yere t'other day and was tellin' us suthin' ter beat that."

"All you fellers hafter do up in this heaven forsaken region is to make up ghost stories," grunted Bud.

"No ghost story erbout it!" declared Si stoutly. "If you go by Wemmick's place ye'll see that tamed wolf. And, as for this other thing I was goin' ter tell ye, ye'll be more than likely ter see it is true yerself, b'fore yer git through to the Three Fingers with that bunch o' cattle."

"Let's hear about it, Si."

"Why, over at Wilson's ranch, near Fort Chance, they had a big St. Bernard dog. They had him ter watch a bunch of sheep Wilson bought. An', by th' way, folks is down on him for bringin' th' nasty critters inter th' country."

"There's money in 'em," interposed Bud, nodding his head knowingly.

"Waal! it seems this St. Bernard worked all right herding th' sheep for awhile; then he gotter runnin' off. By and by they caught him cuttin' out a sheep, drivin' it up a gully, and there killing and sharing it with a female wolf he'd made friends with.

"Them two critters began ter run together, and, by an' by, they gathered a pack erbout 'em. The St. Bernard is the leader, they say, and as this began several seasons back, there is a good bunch of cross-breeds in the pack that ain't afraid of anything on two or four legs, and will fight like fiends.

"They're doin' a lot of damage to the cattle, and raid right up ter the ranch-houses at times. Them wild dogs are sure making trouble. You want to watch out for 'em."

Bud was inclined to think that Si, who loved a bit of gossip, had made out the case rather strong. At times wolves have become a great pest to the cattlemen, although never growing so numerically strong as in years gone by when there was a premium of a dollar a head on wolf scalps, and "wolf-hunters" spent the entire winter season in poisoning the beasts.

A pack of wolves can make themselves very nasty, however, and when the bunch of cattle was started over the trail the next morning, Bud warned his helpers to keep their eyes "peeled" for the wolves, or for the wild dogs.

Bud had managed to furnish Junius Brutus Hamilton Fogg out in clothing more befitting his work than the "hand-me-down" wardrobe in which he was draped when he first dawned upon the cowboy's vision. Bud had mounted him upon his spare pony, too; found him boots, spurs, a cartridge-belt, and gun, and had him practising at every opportunity with a lariat.

Ham did his best to dress the part, and succeeded to an extent, having played many characters in his experience. He tied a blood-red handkerchief around his neck—the knot behind—swaggered in imitation of Bud's bow-legged gait, and swung his gun at the proper angle.

But when he spoke "it was all off." The redundant sentences rolled out in most amusing style. A Shakespearian speech and a cowboy costume were a most surprising combination.

To the Three Finger Ranch—Bud had been over the trail, there and back, once before when Ted and his rough riders had come up here to capture the Gray Goose Band—was no short jaunt. They jogged along easily, and, as the feed was good, Bud allowed the cattle to stop twice before night.

During these stops the quartet of herdsmen took turns sleeping. There might be little chance for refreshing slumber during the dark hours of the night, as Bud very well knew. He was short-handed, and Si Fosdick's stories of the wild dogs and wolves bothered him not a little.

Sure enough, as soon as it grew dark, the long-drawn howlings of various packs reached their ears, and before supper was over the cattle had begun to get nervous.

"No sleep to-night, fellers," said Bud disgustedly. "These are an ornery sort o' folks up yere in Montany—an' yuh kin tell 'em I said so! If I was that dad-binged foolish 'at I wanted tuh live in this las'-chance place, yuh kin bet yuh last plunk that I'd inorgirnate a hunt agin' these yere wolves an' clean 'em out. The folks yere air jes' too triflin' for any use!"

Down out of the hills raced the wolves—or wild dogs; they did not come near enough that first night to be recognized by the herders. But they kept the latter mighty busy until dawn lightened the eastern sky.

The four had to ride round and round the cattle, and all that calmed them at all seemed to be the human voices. The men sang until they were hoarse as so many crows. But Bud begged Fogg not to sing, after awhile.

"Don't yuh do it, Ham!" he pleaded. "I wantuh keep these yere cows tuhgether. I don't want 'em stampeded, and yuh shore have got a notorious voice! Whoever told yuh you could sing, Ham?"

"Possibly my experience in that line has been small," admitted Fogg.

"I should say!"

"I have had no leaning toward the musical stage."

"Don't yuh try it. There's enough bum singers. Even these yere cattle won't stand for your singin'. I kin feel 'em gittin' troubled in their minds immediate yuh begin tuh warble. I tell yuh! recite some o' that Shakespeare stuff to 'em instead. All they want is tuh hear that there's humans about 'em."

And so for the first time, probably, on record, a nervous bunch of cattle was herded by a man who traveled round and round them declaiming *Hamlet's* soliloquy, *Antony's* speech over Cæsar's bier, *King Richard's* resounding periods, and *Lear's* lament. Fogg had the other three convulsed with mirth so that they actually could not sing; but he went on, displaying his repertoire in bland innocence.

CHAPTER V.

THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER.

Fogg was so utterly unconscious when he was being fooled that he was a continual temptation to a fellow of Bud Morgan's proclivities.

"I'm shore going to take that 'ombre home to the ranch, if I have tuh pay his board there!" Bud decided.

They started the cattle on as early as possible in the morning, but they were all four half-dead for want of sleep, and nodded in their saddles. Fogg was saddle-sore, too, being unused to the work.

Finally Bud decided to make an early halt, if he could find water and good grazing. He remembered that somewhere in the vicinity was a spouting spring of sweet water, and, as he remembered it, the grass grew well in

the vicinity. So he left the others to bring on the cattle and spurred ahead to find this oasis.

Bud was soon out of sight of the little herd and was spurring on at a good pace when suddenly he heard a loud barking and yapping up a gulley which split off from the coulée he was following.

"Huh! never knew there was a settler in this vicinity," muttered the cowboy, who had a good bump of remembrance, and knew that there had been nobody living on the track to the Three Finger Ranch when he was over it before.

"And, by thunder! I don't smell sheep. What's the matter with that dawg?"

The barking and snarling continued. Then Bud really thought he heard a human voice, but it was drowned by the savage baying of the dog.

"Something doing, I reckon," grunted Bud. "'Tain't my business; but I'll butt in and see what it is."

He jerked his pony about and headed into the gulley. Again the scream, and this time Bud brought the quirt down upon the mount's flank.

"That's a woman!" he gasped, and urged the pony on with whip and spur.

There was a sharp turn in a ravenlike place. Bud rounded it at a slashing pace, and then he let out a yell of encouragement.

"Hold up! hold up thar!" he yelled. "I'm a-comin'!"

Whether the person to whom he shouted felt any renewed confidence because of Bud's information, she certainly had need of help!

It was a girl. She had been mounted on a rather rawboned cavalry horse, but had dismounted and was now trying to catch and mount again. The horse was not exactly running away; but the longest, leanest, biggest, and wickedest wolf it had ever been Bud's luck to see was circling around both horse and girl, keeping the former in a state of fright, and likewise keeping between the horse and the girl.

All the latter had to defend herself with was a riding-cane. Bud, as he rounded the corner at full pelt, saw the great wolf leap for the girl. She defended herself nobly with the light whip, delivering such cutting blows that the creature retreated.

Then Bud saw the beast better. And he realized that it was no ordinary wolf. It was much too large, it had yellow in its coat, its head was too blunt, and its voice too deep to be merely a timber-wolf. Si Fosdick's story smote his mind, and the cowboy knew he had come across one of the fierce, cross-breed wild dogs which infested the region.

The girl turned her face once in Bud's direction. She had heard his voice, and the cowboy saw vast relief come into her countenance. He did not know her, but it wasn't an emergency that called for any introduction.

Bud rode at the wild dog full tilt, jerked out his gun, and began to empty it into the beast. Unlike an ordinary wolf, the creature did not run, but turned and showed its fangs, striving to leap toward the newcomer even after being sorely wounded.

But the third shot knocked the beast over completely, and then the cowboy raced after the horse and caught him before returning to the side of the frightened girl.

She wasn't like Stella, but she had a good, healthy color, and seemed several years older than the rough riders' little chum. She rode side-saddle, and was quite a dignified young person. Bud, when he came near to her, was rather bashful.

"Oh, sir! what a dreadful creature that is!" exclaimed the girl. "Is it a wolf, or a dog? I have never seen such a beast about the fort," and she smiled up at Bud most enchantingly.

Her neglect to "fall on his neck" and do what Jack Slate would call "me noble preserver act," gave Bud a chance to get a grip on himself. And her mention of the fort gave him an inkling as to what and who she was.

"That yere is a cross-breed, ma'am," he said, carefully removing his hat. "And he is shore a wicked-lookin' critter. I hearn tell down to Dollar that Wilson let a big dawg he owned run with a pack of wolves, an' that th' cross-breeds was fierce."

"Well, they should all be shot, I declare!" said the girl. "And I'll just speak to Mrs. Wilson about it when I ride back that way."

"I reckon you're from Fort Chance, miss?" said Bud curiously.

"You reckon quite right, sir," she replied, smiling again at him.

"An' I kalkerlate you must be Colonel Blythe's darter—daughter, I should say?"

"I'm Rose Blythe—yes. I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, have I?" added Rose companionably, for Rose Blythe had learned a good deal since her coming to the West. One thing was that because a man swung a gun at his belt and talked ungrammatically, it wasn't absolutely certain that he was a "bad man." She had never forgotten her misjudgment of Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, when she had first met him.

"I reckon yuh never laid eyes on me b'fore, miss," Bud admitted. "But yuh know some o' my friends."

"We have mutual friends, then?"

"We shore have."

"Oh, I know!" she cried, with sudden animation. "You know Stella Fosdick, and Mr. Ted Strong?"

"Which same I do. I'm one o' Ted Strong's men over at Moon Valley."

"Yes, yes! That's where Stella said Mr. Strong owned a big ranch. And I can guess who you are, too," declared Rose.

"Can you, Miss Rose?"

"She writes me all about the Moon Valley—and she's there visiting just now, isn't she?"

"You kin bank on that, miss. She shore is."

"And you are Bud Morgan," cried Rose, laughing.

"You win! You're a good guesser."

"I'm a Yankee," declared Rose. "Of course, I can guess. And what are you doing 'way over here, Mr. Morgan?"

Bud told her, and then asked, in turn, how she came to be so far from Fort Chance?

"Is it so far?" the girl inquired wonderingly.

"Why, I'm not exactly familiar with the lay-out of this yere region; but I'm thinking that you'd have a hard ride to reach the fort to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Morgan! don't say that," Rose cried, aghast.

"Won't say it if you don't wanter hear it," he returned. "But it's true."

"Why! I thought I must be within a few miles of the fort. And I have been riding all day!"

"Your hawse looks it, Miss Rose. Seems tuh me it was mighty lucky I happened to hear that wolf-dog a-yapping."

"I'm lost!" declared the girl tragically.

"Nop. Not now, you ain't."

"But I was lost!"

"Huh! Long's yuh didn't know it, don't let it worry yuh."

"But I must get back——"

"That's all right. I'll see 't yuh git home."

"Yet you say you don't know the region, Mr. Morgan?"

"Say!" said Bud, stopping short in his further assurances, and looking feebly at her; "d' yuh mind not callin' me that?"

"Calling you what?" she asked in surprise.

"That yere name?"

"But you are Bud Morgan?"

"Jest plain Bud, ma'am—jest plain Bud."

"All right, Plain Bud," she said, with a twinkle in her eyes. "Do you really think you can guide me to the fort, as well as to rescue me from that awful beast?"

"I reckon so."

"Then you'll be a hero twice in one day," she declared, still smiling, and not much disturbed, after all, over her predicament.

"Jest forget the hero part, an' I'll do anything yuh say," he declared.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT RUN.

Unfortunately, however, it was not possible for Bud to desert his friends and his herd and ride away at once with the colonel's daughter, although she dearly desired to get out for Fort Chance.

"You kin see for yuhself, Miss Rose, that both your own hawse is winded, an' mine ain't any too fresh."

"But what will we do?"

"I was lookin' for a spring that I knowed of 'round here, an' where the cattle can be held by the other boys, if need be, without my help."

"But we can go on at once to the fort? Father will be dreadfully worried. Since I came out here—you know of my adventure with Stella and Mr. Strong?—father has been very careful about letting me go out by myself. Usually an orderly rides along with me—or some of the officers at the fort. But I really thought I was acclimated sufficiently to find my way about."

"That hawse of yours couldn't carry yuh to the fort—not at a fast pace. Neither could my pony stand it very well. I'll give yuh a hand up, and we'll ride over to this yere spring I speak of, and when the cattle come erlong we'll git fresh mounts, lead your hawse, and make a quick dash for it."

"Are you sure of finding the way? Forgive me for seeming to doubt you."

"There's a feller with me that knows the landmarks and signs," said Bud.

"Oh, no! I'd much prefer that you should go with me," Rose hastened to say. "You know, I feel as though I know you."

"Oh, I'll stick tuh yuh," returned Bud, good-naturedly, and when the girl was mounted they rode back the way Bud had come.

They found—or, rather, Bud found—the water in twenty minutes; but the cattle did not come up for a good two hours. Meanwhile, Rose Blythe had a chance to find out that this big, long-haired, handsome cattleman was one of the most interesting individuals she had met since coming out from Boston.

Bud was not like Ted Strong, of course. He was older, and unfortunately possessed less education; but he was a picturesquely typical cowboy, and the girl found the type mighty attractive!

The appearance of the girl rather took aback Bud's companions. But she did not confuse Fogg. He became tragically polite, and amused Rose greatly by his remarks and oddities. She took pity on the men, too, and helped Fogg get the supper.

"For when Ham is hung," said Bud judicially, "I swow I dunno who'll be th' worst cook in a cow-camp—an' I've seen some fierce ones, too, in my time."

Evening was closing in when Bud and Rose, mounted on fresh ponies and the cowboy leading the horse from the fort, started on their long jaunt across the hills. Bud depended upon an early rising moon to show them the way.

But it was not a peaceful ride. An hour had not passed, dusk had not fallen, the coming moon had not begun to tinge the light clouds in the east, when Rose suddenly crowded her pony close to Bud's stirrup and demanded hesitatingly:

"Mr. Morgan, what is that sound I keep hearing?"

Now Bud knew very well what it was; and he wasn't feeling at all pleasant over its occurrence; but he grabbed a chance to shake her off the subject.

"I s'pose yuh'll say next:

> "'Mister Morgan
> Played th' organ,
> His old man played th' drum!
> His sister played
> Th' tambourine,
> An' his brother went "tum-tum! tum-tum"!'

I'm plumb sore on that name o' mine," grumbled Bud.

"I had no idea of being so rude, Mr.—Bud."

"That's better."

"But you don't answer me, sir."

"Did you ask me a question?" queried Bud innocently.

She looked at him suspiciously. Bud spoke altogether too innocently to be honest.

"Listen!" she commanded, holding up her head and seeking to draw her pony down to a walk. Cow-ponies don't know how to walk—unless they're dead tired—and her mount shook his head angrily; he had no idea of being left behind.

"Come on, miss!" called Bud.

"Stop and answer me," she said. "Otherwise I shall consider you very, very rude."

Of course, that brought Bud back.

"Yuh sure hear lots o' sounds out on these preraries," he said. "But there ain't none of 'em worth holding back for."

"There! what is it?"

"Seems tuh me," said Bud weakly, "it sounds like some critter cryin'——"

"I know! it's wolves! It's a pack of them. And it's those wild dogs, like that brute who attacked me this afternoon. Mr. Morgan, are we in danger?"

"Well, if we be—jes' th' teeniest mite of danger, yuh know," he said, grinning, "this ain't th' right thing for us tuh do. Them cusses—beggin' yuh pardon—is behind us. We better git on an' not have no trouble with 'em."

Bud spoke carelessly, and he grinned cheerfully; never-

[illegible] Bud watched anxiously the east for the light of the rising moon. If they were to keep on this pace over such rough ground the cowboy desired [illegible] they were going!

Meanwhile, [illegible] occasionally, but continuously, the howling of the pack continued. The wolf-dogs had [illegible] and had struck their trail—no doubt of that. [illegible] the pack was coming [illegible]

Bud [illegible] the colonel's daughter. He had heard that she was [illegible], and that her fear had made [illegible] Fred Strong and Stella Fosdick when they were all three imprisoned in the caverns by the avalanche; [illegible] quite a different person from what Bud had [illegible] she would be in this emergency.

[illegible] chased by a mob of such horrid beasts [illegible] it was [illegible]

[illegible] up the pace for two miles without [illegible] Then Rose turned her face toward him again [illegible] pleasingly, perhaps:

"[illegible]?"

"[illegible]," returned the cowboy with [illegible]

"[illegible]!" [illegible] "[illegible] treat [illegible] I know they're [illegible]"

"All right, [illegible]," admitted Bud meekly.

[illegible] laughed nervously at this.

"I didn't mean to [illegible]," she said.

"Well, you were a [illegible]. Yuh know, I can't help [illegible] myself. That's the truth, you [illegible]

"[illegible] do you think that's really it?" she [illegible]

"Why, they're not [illegible] so terrible fast on us—don't think so."

"[illegible] hear that?"

With startling distinctness a chorus of howls came down the wind. She looked at Bud imploringly. It was light enough for her to see his face.

"Oh, thunder!" groaned Bud, seeing it was useless to try to keep the truth from her longer. "That's another pack. They are two hundred after us."

CHAPTER VII.

"The [illegible]"

The ponies pattered along at a pretty swift pace, while the hot blood began to tingle in Rose's veins. The song of the entire great hunting pack was not to be shaken off.

Bud and Rose managed to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

"I never expected to be chased by wolves out here," gasped the girl, half-laughing now.

"Reckon know what tuh expect in this yere world," grunted Bud.

"How philosophical you are."

"Don't tell me wolves."

She laughed again, adding:

"[illegible] that there aren't enough wolves left in this country to make wolf-hunting profitable."

"[illegible] if a feller sh'd come erlong right now an' kill them critters behind, I'd make it a profitable job for him—shore!"

"Oh, I believe you! They sound horrid."

"They be nasty."

"I used to read awful stories of people chased in Russia by wolves. Didn't you ever?"

"Why, I ain't much of a reader, tuh tell th' truth," admitted Bud.

"Oh! you have been doing things instead of reading about them," said Rose quickly. "That's much better."

"Nice uh yuh tuh say so," declared Bud warmly.

"They have great droves of wolves in the barren places of Russia and Siberia. And they follow sleighs for hours and hours, and sometimes pull down the horses and kill them—and the people in the sleigh."

"That's cheerful!" drawled Bud.

"And once, there was a peasant and his wife [illegible] driving in the wilderness, and the wolves chased them," pursued Rose, conjuring up the most horrible story she had ever read. "And the wolves overtook the sleigh. What do you suppose they did?"

"Is this a conundrum?" demanded Bud. "For, if it is, I ain't no good at 'em."

"No, sir! It's a story. I'll tell you."

"Yuh better tell [illegible] about sum'in' more encouraging."

"Oh, I sha'n't lose my courage while you are with me, Mr. Bud!" she declared.

"Well, now! ain't you the great girl for chuckin' bouquets at a feller!" exclaimed Bud.

Rose was determined to tell the story.

"So the poor peasant thought what he should do. The wolves were bound to pull down the horses, and then they'd eat the whole family. If he jumped out and sacrificed himself to the wild beasts, the woman could not drive the horses, and she and the child would be killed anyway.

"Surely, if his wife leaped out and sacrificed herself, the child would die for want of sustenance. So he snatched the baby from her arms and flung it to the wolves, and, while they fought over it, the peasant and his wife escaped."

"My Lord!" exclaimed Bud. "He was an ornery cuss."

"What would you have done, Mr. Bud Morgan?"

"Huh! Me? Well I dunno. It shore was a hard case. But th' kid—shucks! I'd ha' arbitrated th' business somehow."

"Your powers of diplomacy must be great," laughed Rose, with a little catch in her voice, after a particularly vicious chorus of howls from their pursuers. "How are you going to 'arbitrate' in this case?"

"Shucks! 'Tain't come to that, yet. I reckon th' old Lucy gun will do er little execution among them varmints."

"Perhaps we had better turn the horse loose and let the wolves chase him."

"They wouldn't. He'd run faster than we could if he was free."

"We've just got to do something pretty soon!" gasped Rose [illegible] "I believe I see them coming."

Bud was looking ahead. It was growing lighter in the

sky now. The moon would soon rise and then they would be able to see if anything followed close on their trail.

Now and again the howling broke out. It wasn't altogether the mournful, wailing note of the true wolf; a wolf seldom if ever barks, although he "yaps" with eagerness when close upon the quarry. The Alaskan dogs and other only partly domesticated canines do not bark much, either.

But these cross-breeds, fathered by the big St. Bernard that had returned to the wild, barked, and yelped, and yapped on the trail like a gang of half-trained hounds.

Bud kept both ponies up to the mark; but leading the third horse was a nuisance. The cavalry horse was so much bigger than the ponies, and his gait was so much different, that he was either going too fast or too slow all the time.

They were not following any trail. Bud, knowing the general direction of Fort Chance and the trail which led to it from Dollar Station, was steering by the stars, and went across hill and dale like an arrow shot from a bow. The way was comparatively smooth, and nothing retarded their advance but the hanging back of the led horse.

"You would better cast him loose, after all," Rose said, as she saw the trouble the beast was making her companion.

"He's got Uncle Sam's brand on him; your father'd have suthin' tuh say about our lettin' him go wild," returned Bud. "Guess we won't fling th' baby to th' wolves yet awhile!" and he grinned.

At the top of the next ridge the mounting moon broke upon their thankful vision. It was almost as red as the sun had been when it set, and its early rays were cast levelly along the back track. Bud and Rose pulled in and waited to breathe their horses while they looked back.

And their curiosity was rewarded. Tearing over a mound less than half a mile away came a great pack of running streaks of dark and gray. The two packs had joined forces. There were near four score of the beasts. Such a pack of wolves Bud had never seen in all his experience.

"They're a healthy-lookin' mob," he muttered.

"Oh, Mr. Bud! we must run!"

"Let th' ponies breathe a bit. They'll be all the freshes."

"Don't you think we'd better try to reach Wilson's ranch?"

"That's up to the north of us somewhere. And we can't run three miles now before those fellers overtake us."

Rose grew pallid, and her lips parted, but she could not speak.

"That don't mean that they're goin' tuh git th' best of us—not by a long sight!" Bud hastened to say.

"What can we do?"

"A dozen things, I reckon. In the first place—can you shoot?"

"What with?"

"This," and Bud produced his treasured six-shooter.

"Oh, yes. I have been practising with a revolver at the fort. But my! that is a heavy one."

"Waal, it ain't no lady's plaything, yuh kin bet. But them dawgs will be thick enough tergether so't yuh can't miss of 'em—not much."

"I will manage it," said Rose confidently.

"That's the ticket! Keep up yuh courage. We're a long way from cashin' in [illegible]"

"But what will you do, Mr. Bud? Have you another?"

"Nop. Ain't got no gun. But I got suthin' better."

"What weapon is that?"

"The good old rope," he replied emphatically.

"Your lariat?"

"That's the ticket!"

"But what can you do with that against these wolves?"

"I'll show yuh, miss! Lemme tell yuh, a rope is a cowman's best friend. You kin have th' gun—an' lemme buckle this cartridge-belt around yuh waist. Yuh know how tuh load?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then come on up this way. There's a bunch o' rocks. You dismount an' git up among 'em."

"But the poor horses!" cried Rose.

"They'll be all right for awhile. The ponies won't run far, and, if the hoss does, why we'll hafter look for him afterward. Leastwise, I'm going to stay mounted myself, and I'll show yuh what good a rope is, even with that pack of yapping devils!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A MASSACRE.

"Yuh think yuh kin keep loading and firing at them beasts if I don't let 'em come too near yuh?" Bud demanded, as they reached the rocks.

"I'll do anything you say," replied the girl bravely.

"That's the way tuh talk! We'll make this bunch o' kiyudles look like a stack of punched nickels."

Bud leaped down from his pony, and let the led horse run free; but he did not trust his mount in the same way; he knew he might want him at any moment, and he clung to the bridle.

He helped Rose dismount, however, and allowed her pony to stand unhitched. Both ponies trembled whenever the yapping of the wolf-dogs rose on the night air. They were doubtless more terrified than their riders.

"This yere's a good fort," declared Bud, with satisfaction. "I bet many a time it's held off Injuns."

"Oh! do you think so, Mr. Bud?"

"Shore! And we kin be glad these ain't Injuns that are after us."

"Oh, I am glad of that."

"Well, now, there's a place for yuh tuh crouch down—jest between them two rocks. And there's a rock at your back. They kin only come at yuh from the front. Why! if yuh don't happen tuh fall asleep yuh kin hold 'em off all night!"

"Go to sleep! How could I sleep under such circumstances?"

"Waal, I didn't jest know how sleepy yuh was," said Bud drily.

"You would joke in any danger, I do believe!" she cried.

"Yuh might as well take what's comin' tuh yuh laughin' as cryin'."

"But what will you do? Why don't you come up here, too?"

"Jumping sand-hills!" exclaimed Bud; "I don't kalkerlate ter be held up all night by these ornery brutes. We wantuh jog erlong tuh th' fort. Yuh father will be lookin' for yuh, and it's clos't ontuh ten o'clock now."

[illegible]

panion into their jaws. The whole pack stopped and fought over and tore the body, while Bud circled about and prepared for another cast.

The [illegible] cow-pony could stand any amount of [illegible] it was so terribly afraid of the wolves! [illegible] him to the work with bit and spur.

[illegible] galloped up the slope and dashed in among the [illegible] and snarling before Rose's fortress. [illegible] had knocked over three, and that had caused [illegible] diversion among the ranks of the beasts.

[illegible] another and started down the hill with his [illegible]. This fellow he had caught in mid-air as it was leaping high, and the rope did not tighten about the wolf's [illegible].

Instead, the noose held it around the body. And that [illegible] managed to get his feet, and he was so nimble that [illegible] than being dragged. [illegible] the rope too taut for [illegible] off, however.

[illegible] Bud turned the pony short; the wolf leaped and [illegible] the mounted man. Before it could scramble [illegible] Bud spurred the pony away and yanked [illegible] off his feet.

[illegible] and agonized yelps brought half a [illegible] of its bloodthirsty brethren about him. Bud could hardly manage to get the soon battered body away from them long enough to cast it loose.

By this time the big pack was broken up into a dozen groups, most of them snarling and fighting over their [illegible] companions. Their cannibalistic traits [illegible] and the massacre was terrible to behold [illegible] moonlight.

The cavalry horse had started off alone at a great clip, with a dozen or more wolves at his tail. But the other cow-pony knew the uselessness of running. He used his heels with good effect, however, and knocked over a couple [illegible] tormentors, who were quickly seized upon by their mates.

Back Bud rode to Rose's position. But here the brave girl, inspired by the excitement of the moment, had done such execution with the big revolver that the brutes were already on the keen run. She sprang out and emptied the gun a second time after the skulking forms, and when Bud rode up with a cheer she could even smile up at him.

"You're a daisy!" cried the cowboy. "Jest [illegible] hold this pony now, while I try to git your mount. We'll skip out while the wolves are having a gineral scrimmage among themselves. Oh, I knew if we could git 'em going they'd forgit all about us in settling private [illegible]."

"Is it safe for you to be afoot, Bud?" she cried.

"I'll show yuh," he returned, and started on the dead run for the squealing pony that was just then surrounded by snarling, leaping enemies.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF THE ADVENTURE.

So busy was the second pony with his assailants that he allowed Bud to catch him easily. And a few well-directed kicks from the cowboy sent the wolves scattering. Bud jumped into Rose's side-saddle and hurried back to the rocks.

There they exchanged mounts, and without losing

further time, gave the pohies the spur and left the scene of the carnage. Scarcely half a dozen wolves yelped on their trail, and Bud, for precaution's sake, shot them.

"I shall never forget this experience, Mr. Morgan," Rose declared. "And how I can ever thank you —"

"Thank yourself," interposed Bud quickly. "If you hadn't had the pluck to stand up and fight for yourself I couldn't have saved you."

They toiled on with their sweating ponies until near midnight before they found the trail leading directly to Fort Chance. And, after they had followed this for several miles, the clear notes of a bugle blown at a short distance ahead apprised them of the approach of a search party, sent out by Colonel Blythe.

Rose grew quite angry when she learned that Bud was determined not to go to the fort with her now that she had found her friends.

"I got them cattle to deliver to old man Botts," he explained, "an' yere I be clean off my trail. Yuh'll hafter excuse me this time. Miss Rose."

To tell the truth he did not propose to run up against the colonel and have to endure any expressions of gratitude.

So seeing that he was stubborn, the girl had to give in.

"I am coming to Moon Valley before I go back East this year," she declared. "And, if father gets a furlough, he may come with me. So don't think you are going to escape being thanked for all time!"

The horse that Rose had originally rode had been captured by the soldiers, so Rose's saddle was shifted, and then Bud rode away, leading his own pony. But he did not go far—only to a distance sufficient to be hidden from the party from the fort.

"Come, boys!" he said to the exhausted ponies, "I wanter use yuh in the future. It's us for a snooze and a rest till morning. And, anyway, I don't fancy passing near the stamping grounds o' them wild dogs again tuh-night."

He hobbled the ponies and made a rousing fire which kept him well warmed until daybreak. By that time the ponies were comparatively fresh again, and he rode back to the cattle-camp in triumph.

But his assistants were not slow to joke him about Rose Blythe. Even Ham passed a few pointed remarks; but Bud was too wise to say anything about the adventure he and his fair companion had had with the wild dogs.

Two days later they delivered the bunch of cattle to the proprietor of the Three Finger Ranch. Bud paid off his two cowboy helpers, but he retained Ham Fogg with him.

"You're such an amusin' cuss, I can't let yuh go," he said to the ex-actor. "I'm goin' tuh take yuh back tuh Moon Valley an' let Ted Strong look yuh over."

"You evidently think, Mr. Morgan, that I am a strange specimen of humanity," declared Fogg, with some show of vexation.

"Yuh shore be!" declared Bud.

"I do not know why, sir. Most men, if placed outside their natural environment, will be 'tenderfeet,' as you call them."

"Pooh! what d'yuh care?" demanded Bud soothingly.

"I do not like to have my intelligence called into question," said Fogg, with dignity.

"Oh, you ain't no fool," declared Bud bluntly. "Yuh may look ha'f baked, but, by thunder! you're like th' kid that his folks, an' all th' neighbors, didn't think was very bright. He useter hang eround th' village [illegible] an' th' men useter have a whole lot o' fun on [illegible] his ch'ice betwixt a silver three-cent piece an' one [illegible] old-fashioned copper two-cent pieces that useter be prevalent. The little skeezicks 'ud take th' two cents ev'ry time.

"Fin'ly one day we axed him what made him take the two-cent piece instead o' th' three-cent. We thought mebbe he took it 'cause it was the biggest.

"'Naw!' says he; 'not 'cause it's th' biggest. But if I took th' three cents them galoots 'ud stop offerin' me either!'"

"Ahem! I like the comparison," grunted Fogg. "I may look like a fool, but you will admit that I'm not!"

"That's it," declared Bud coolly.

Fogg might have taken Bud's somewhat harsh criticism in anger; but at bottom the ex-actor was a good fellow, and conceit had not quite eaten up his better sense. He began to see that his "posing" before men who were really men belittled him, and he began to drop his stilted manner of speech and left off blowing about "how he knocked 'em in Kankakee."

Having delivered the cattle in good condition and accepted Botts' receipt for the same, Bud started back to Dollar Station with Fogg. The ponies had had a hard time, so they rode slowly, and were hanging about the station a couple of days before they could get a chance to ship the horses East and start themselves for Moon Valley.

But, as Fogg said, when he understood the matter thoroughly, "Nemesis was on Bud's track!" Nemesis appeared in the guise of a red-faced old fellow with a snow-white goatee and mustache and in a military [illegible] uniform, who rode into Dollar Station and caught the cowboy before he could get away.

"You are Mr. Bud Morgan?" demanded this apparition, riding up to the Long Reach Hotel, and spying Bud and Fogg on the platform before it, tipped back in their chairs and sucking on two of the worst five-cent cigars that ever were shipped over the Northern [illegible] Railroad.

"Yuh got me there, pard. I can't deny the soft impeachment," returned Bud.

"Well, I, sir, am Colonel Blythe," declared the military man, with dignity.

"Oh, holy Peter! I'm in for it now!" groaned the long-haired cowboy, looking about wildly for a way of escape.

"I could not be contented, Mr. Morgan, to allow you to return to Moon Valley without a word on my part. To say I thank you for your conduct, regarding my daughter, is too feeble for utterance. But I have ridden over here to shake your hand, sir!"

"My goodness, colonel! That was a long ride for a small errand," declared Bud, getting down off the hotel veranda to take the colonel's hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Morgan. And I wish you to take my regards to Colonel Strong. He is likewise a fine young man. By the way, I have a friend who has settled in your country."

"Well, is that so, sir?"

"Perhaps you have heard of him. He is Amasa Longnecker."

"Great Peter! I've heard of him, sure enough. He's the fellow who believes he can beat the Standard Oil Company?"

"Well, he certainly believes there is oil in Dolbier."

"Yup. The school of hope."

"And if there is oil in Kansas or Nebraska, why not in Dolbier?" [illegible]

"I dunno. I never was good at [illegible]."

"My, Longnecker will make a fortune if his ideas prove feasible."

"If," [illegible] Bud, but fortunate's too low for the colonel to hear.

"He's having trouble with some of his neighbors," [illegible] Colonel Blythe. "They don't seem to take kindly to his [illegible], and they have expressed their objections with more emphasis than moderation."

"They gettin' high jinks with him, have they?" asked Bud. "Who are the Grantubs?"

"That I could not tell you. There seems to be a shiftless population over there that is of very little value to any community; I imagine Longnecker believes that some of the outrages committed on his property have been instigated by the [illegible] settlers, although performed by this [illegible] gang."

"I'd learn 'em that he'd brought some pretty tough lays into the country himself," observed Bud quietly. "They say these sod-busters and drill-men are a hard lot."

"Well, Mr. Morgan, I am not on the field, so I do not know the ins and outs of the matter. I merely know that Mr. Longnecker is a generally respected man, and one who is likely to develop the country over there. He is no fool, although he may be a bit visionary.

"You and Mr. Strong are in touch with that section. I wish you would call Mr. Strong's attention to it, and have him go and see Longnecker. I'd consider it a great favor, I do assure you."

"Sure I'll tell him!" declared Bud.

And after again expressing his gratitude to the cowboys, Colonel Blythe rode away. Bud and Fogg left Dolbier Station that afternoon for Stronghurg.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW NIGHT-WRANGLER.

Bud didn't have quite all the fun he expected upon introducing Jerome Hamilton Fogg to the boys at Bloom Valley. Fogg had "taken a tumble" to himself, and his idiosyncracies were not so marked as when Bud first met him. However, he "added to the joy of nations," and before the evening was over, the boys had him hoisted to a table at one end of the room, reciting Hamlet's soliloquy.

That the table had been purposely weakened so that, when Hamlet leaped into the grave, it broke down and the table and Ham came crashing to the floor, was no more than might have been expected.

"Dot vas a great recitationment," declared Carl. "Idt vas like Wagner's moosic—it ends mit a crash, yet!"

"I tell you what, fellows," Ben Tremont said seriously, "we've just been needin' such a chap as Ham to come along. Our elocution is bad. We get careless, talkin' to cattle and hosses, an' other mavericks like ourselves.

"Why, I heard Clay Whipple talking to that pair of mules he had hitched to the supply-wagon the other day, and talking in such a way that it would have brought the blush to his Sunday school teacher's cheek."

"You can't say 'please' to a mule an' get good effect from it," interposed Clay.

"Just you think back," pursued Big Ben, "to the times you useter stand up on the platform at the Sunday school concert and recite:

> "'Little drops of water,
> Little grains of sand,
> Make the mighty ocean
> And the bounteous land.'

Yuh had elocution down fine in them days, Clay."

Clay chucked a boot at him, but laughed with the rest.

"And when Ted, here, finds it necessary to call a cow-puncher down, if his language flowed more smoothly, he'd get better effect."

"I don't need any elocutionary lessons to tell you what I think of you," interposed the King of the Wild West, grinning. "I've had occasion enough to tell you, Lazy-bones."

"But with cultivation——"

"That's right!" declared Bud, breaking in. "We all want cultivation. We'd oughter chip in an' pay Ham's salary for teachin' us how tuh speechify. When I was a kid, I allus hankered tuh recite 'Th' Boy Stood on th' Burning Deck.' But derned if I could ever remember the whole of it at once."

"You need a course of memory lessons, not elocution," grunted Beanpole. "I've noticed it. You've had my knife for an hour, and you'd better hand it back before you begin to believe it belongs to you."

"I reckon you fellows don't need a teacher of elocution half as much as I do a night-wrangler," said Ted, who had already had a talk with Ham Fogg. "Mr. Fogg is going to tackle the job."

"It's a waste of good material," declared Kit.

"Dot iss true!" rejoined Dutchy. "Vot goot vill such execution as dot do de hosses?"

At that 'break' there was a shout of laughter, and the boys turned their wit upon Dutchy. Fogg, however, had taken the joking good-naturedly. And this did not end it, by any manner of means.

When Blisters, who had been out on the range, came in and heard Fogg spouting, he at once took it upon himself to "haze" the ex-actor.

"Tell yuh what!" Blisters remarked to several choice spirits down behind the bunk-house, "we gotter do sumthin' tuh that feller b'fore his newness wears off."

"What'll we do?" demanded Clay, glad enough to be in mischief.

"Huh! he's up there declaiming 'Out damned spot!' and givin' Lady Macbeth's night-walking scene for Stella's benefit. And this morning he was givin' us the ghost-talk from Hamlet—you know: 'Hamlet, Hamlet, I am thy father's ginlet!' and all that rot.

"What we wanter do is tuh give him a taste of a real bona-fide ghost—hey fellers?"

The bunch agreed hilariously, and so the plot was laid. Fogg was shunted out to the range, and established an intimate acquaintance with the cow-ponies in the first place by being kicked. But it wasn't serious, and he learned to approach the creatures thereafter from the right end.

The very first night he undertook his task alone, however, Blisters worked his ghostly surprise upon him. The young rascal should have been on duty himself; but he exchanged with one of the cowboys, and so rounded up back of the stables just after dark, Clay, Ben, Carl,

Beanpole, Jack Slate, and Bud Morgan—although the latter was old enough to know better.

These seven conspirators enveloped in coarse sheets, which Blisters had bribed the cook at the ranch-house to let them have, and the cloths being ripped to allow their arms to emerge, and holes recklessly cut for their eyes, the seven made a very terrible-looking cavalcade indeed, when they rode away toward the part of the range where Fogg and the bunch of cow-ponies were encamped.

They all tied the sheets in closely about their waists; then the skirts flowed almost to the ground and hid their darker clothing. The flapping sheets made some of the ponies dance, and Carl, who insisted on riding Wall-Eye, came near being bucked off half a dozen times.

With great hilarity, the ghostly riders hurried on toward their goal. But as they crossed the trail which came in from the West, emerging from a deep coulée suddenly, they came upon a lone rider, who was spurring on toward the ranch.

To see those seven shrouded riders appear in single file across his path, flung the stranger into a panic. And his horse was quite as frightened, too!

The beast stood up on its hind legs, snorting fearfully. The man uttered a yell, and before Bud could shout to him, he had plunged his spurs into his mount's sides, jerked him around, and sped off across the prairie land at top-speed, making a long detour to get back upon the trail again.

"Holy Hamilton! who was that?" demanded Clay Whipple.

"Somebody going to see Ted. We'll hear about this, fellers," declared Ben.

"Oh, hang! We'll have the game, then, if we must have the name. Come on," urged Blisters.

"Ham will be frightened to death," objected Bud. "I didn't know we looked so awful."

"Don't get cold feet, Goldilocks," said Ben. "Come on."

So they went forward with their nefarious work. In half an hour or so, they came to the coulée where Ham Fogg was holding the bunch of ponies.

"Hold up, fellers!" exclaimed Blisters, in a low voice. "We wanter let him know we're coming."

"Whatcher got there, yuh young scamp?" demanded Bud suspiciously, as Blisters produced a strange-looking implement from under his white robe.

"Don't yuh bother. I know what I'm about," returned Blisters. "Ride up here so't we can all appear in line on the top of the hill at the word."

"That's a megaphone," exclaimed Jack. "Deah boy! what do you mean to do with it?"

"Wait! Git in line here."

Blisters waited for the nervous ponies to all come near. Then he lifted up the home-made machine, aiming its wide mouth skywards, and shouted through it in a most mournful key:

"WOE! WOE! W-O-E!"

The long-drawn wail of that last "woe" would have started gooseflesh on a rhinoceros!

The voice boomed over the coulée, seemingly like a voice falling from the skies.

"Jumping sand-hills!" muttered Bud, half sorry now that he had allowed the sport. "That will send poor Ham into a conniption fit."

"Gee!" exclaimed Ben, with a shiver. "That sounds like the trump of doom, sure enough."

"Blisters is a healthy-looking Gabriel," chuckled Clay.

"Once more for the cigars, old man!" urged Beanpole.

"Give him some of his own medicine," suggested Jack. "'Blow winds, blow, and crack your cheeks!'"

"No you don't! Make it something more grewsome," said Ben.

So Blisters tried again, and this time sent the awful voice booming across the coulée, its refrain being:

"Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn and cauldron bubble!"

with all the "demi-semi-quavers" he could invent.

"By thunder," exclaimed Clay. "That sounds so bad that it scares me!"

"Now, boys!" cried Blisters, and he spurred his pony forward.

They all leaped into sight on the summit of the ridge which bounded the deep hollow where Fogg and his charges were encamped. The appearance of the seven ghostly figures against the skyline was enough to startle not only Ham, but the ponies, into a panic.

But suddenly Wall-Eye, Carl's irrepressible mount, stretched forth his neck and uttered a high, irrepressible whinny! Immediately it was answered by a mate from the bunch below.

"Shut him off! shut him off, you darned Dutchman!" exclaimed Ben.

"Shut him off your selluf!" responded Carl. "When puts your handt on dis pony's nose an' he kicks as high as von kite, yet!"

Again Wall-Eye stretched his neck; Blisters grabbed him and shut off his wind. Instantly, as Carl had foretold, Wall-Eye's hoofs flew up. Carl had been turned the other way, speaking to Ben. The kick was unexpected, and he lost his stirrups.

With a shout of anger the German youth flew over his mount's head, his sheet flapping, and his lips emitting a quantity of what Jack Slate called "Carl's broken China." The pony jerked clear of Blisters' handhold and galloped down into the coulée.

"That busts the combination!" yelled Bud, and spurred down after the runaway.

CHAPTER XI.

A MACEDONIAN CRY.

With shouts of laughter at Carl's predicament, the other boys spurred down the hill after Bud. The ponies below were on the verge of stampeding, and Fogg was running among them, trying to bring them to their senses.

"What, ho! varlets! let the pork-and-cabbage fall!" bawled Blisters, through the megaphone, paraphrasing Scott's famous line in "Marmion."

Fogg's own tones rose above the confusion.

"Take off those sheets, sirrahs! Give me fair play. Come at me one at a time, and I will meet thee all!"

"Hooroar!" thundered the megaphone. "'This rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I!'"

But just then Bud leaned over and snatched the megaphone away, and his voice rose in command:

"Off with those sheets. We'll have the whole blamed bunch on the run in a minute. Stop yuh nonsense, Blisters!"

Indeed, they had a hard time keeping the ponies from departing on the keen jump, and when it was over,

the bunch had paid for their fun by about half an hour of the hardest work they had accomplished before in weeks.

Then they compared notes about a campfire, while Carl prepared a can of coffee. It had been an expensive "hazing."

In the first place, they would have to pay for the clothes, all of them were torn past redemption. Carl limped about the fire with many muttered German expletives, having strained his leg badly in falling from Wall Eye's wicked back.

Bud had battered the megaphone to bits over the heads of two obstinate ponies. Ben had lost his six-shooter, and Clay had pretty nearly had his clothes torn off his back when Jack helped him off with the sheet.

When these matters were enumerated, Fogg stood up solemnly before them all, and said:

"And that is not the end of the matter, sirrahs! I find that an attempt has been made to insult me, to misuse my person, to injure my feelings, to belittle me before others. Am I not entitled to reparation?"

The others, who had not seen Bud whispering in the ex-actor's ear and "putting him up to this," looked at each other in some confusion.

"What do you mean?" asked Ben. "We ain't hurt you."

"You gentlemen claim, I presume, to be fair-minded?"

"We're good sports, if that's what you mean," grunted Blisters.

Fogg turned upon him with stern eye.

"It is with you I would have first settlement," he declared.

"Huh?"

"As the injured party, I claim the right to challenge you and choose my own weapons," declared Fogg, emphatically.

"Oh, hold on!" exclaimed Clay. "Don't be so bloodthirsty."

"I demand that Mr. Blisters give me personal satisfaction for this unprovoked insult," said Fogg, unshaken in his intention.

"Aw, cheese it!" was Blisters' comment.

"Sirrah!" cried Fogg tragically, and advancing a step toward Blisters, who stepped quickly back. "I shall have satisfaction—and if you will not fight, sir, then I will take satisfaction upon thy cowardly person!"

"Aw, g'wan!" grunted Blisters. "What's eatin' yuh? We was only foolin'."

"And I am not fooling, sir! I am in earnest. I demand reparation. And if you are too cowardly to fight me upon my own terms, then I will challenge you all," with a sweeping gesture of his long arms, "one after the other, and brand ye all the cowards that ye are!"

This was laying it on pretty thick, and some of the boys grew vexed.

"What's the matter with him, anyway?" demanded Ben. "If I wasn't twice his size——"

"Sirrah!" exclaimed Fogg, turning sharply on the giant, "prate not of thy size. Bulk is merely flesh and bone. It is the dauntless courage of a man that counts. To you I will speak, having first settled with this minion," and he pointed a long finger at Blisters.

"Here! I say now!" exclaimed Blisters. "You call me names and I'll hand yuh one!"

"Ha! th' varlet will fight!" cried Fogg joyfully. "The weapons!"

He rushed off to his tent.

"Say!" croaked Blisters, "the dern fool's gone dippy. We frightened him out of his wits. His brain-pan's leakin'. What th' dickens will I do, fellers?"

Bud shook his head gloomily.

"I dunno," he said. "Guess you'll hafter fight him——"

"Not by a blamed sight!"

"Then he'll go after Ben."

"We better grab him and tie his hands," said the giant weakly. "I'd never gone into this fool business if I'd supposed he was so easily made bug-house. Not me!"

Back strode Fogg, and Blisters actually tried to get behind Big Ben when he saw him coming. But the ex-actor did not bring pistols. Instead he bore two staves, about three feet long, with a crosspiece tied tightly near an end of each, to make a handle and guard. They were, indeed, wooden swords, only blunt.

"Choose your weapon, sirrah!" Fogg exclaimed, offering both implements to Blisters.

"Aw, shucks! I ain't goin' tuh fool with them," exclaimed Blisters, vastly relieved, yet shame-faced because of the roar of laughter that went up.

"I demand satisfaction!" exclaimed Fogg. "Choose!"

"Aw, g'wan!"

Instantly Fogg seized one of the wooden swords and smote Blisters a cracking blow along his leg. It was heavy enough to raise a welt, and brought a yell of anger from the other's lips.

"Then, sir, fight!" commanded Fogg, flinging down the second weapon, and putting himself in the position of the fencer's defense.

Blisters, smarting with the pain of the blow, grabbed up the wand and tried to cut Fogg over the head with it. But he could not seem to touch the ex-actor. Again and again he swung his stick, till he made it whistle in the air, and each time Fogg caught the blow on his own sword and did not retreat an inch.

Then suddenly he taught Blisters a lesson. Instead of merely defending himself, he rapped the young fellow smartly over the knuckles, and Blisters dropped his cane with a howl.

Then, indeed, did Fogg play about him with his im-

plement, beating Blisters' coat as though it had been a carpet, and leaving many a bruise on the boy's body. Blisters could not get near enough to use his fists, and he was glad to find his dropped wand, and use it as best he might to ward off Fogg's blows. But in ten minutes he begged for mercy.

"Hast thou enough, varlet?" demanded Fogg, quite unwinded.

"You bet this varlet has. Ow! wow! Let up!"

"Then away with thee! Having learned thy lesson, do not forget it. Let the next man pick up thy weapon and measure it with mine."

Big Ben was too pig-headed to be warned. It looked too easy! So he grabbed the wooden sword and entered the ring.

The boys had heaped much light fuel on the fire, and by its radiance the second battle was begun. And if Fogg had done Blisters up well, he went around Big Ben like a cooper 'round a cask!

Ben took the medicine bravely, and finally in hitting back broke his sword in two.

"There, hang you!" shouted the giant, who certainly was angry at his failure to even touch his antagonist. "Fling down your stick and lemme get at you!"

Fogg broke into a shout of laughter, in which Bud joined, the cowboy rolling over and over on the grass.

"I believe on my life, Bud Morgan, you put this whole game up on us," growled Ben.

"It strikes me that somebody's been sold rather badly—and it isn't Fogg," said Clay Whipple.

"Gentlemen," said the panting elocutionist, "consider what I might have done to these two fellows—or to any of you—had these been real swords. You are all familiar with the weapons you carry, while I am a greenhorn. But in my business—as a Shakespearian actor—it is absolutely necessary for one to learn the art of fence. Every man to his trade, therefore, and be not too ready to decry and flaunt he who knows not your own. He may be a master in his own line of business."

"Ham, you're all right!" cried Bud, shaking hands with him. "I'm proud of you. And now, if you've got another stick like that, I'll take a lesson of you myself."

So the hazing scrape ended in something better. The rough riders were glad enough to learn a new art, and during their spare time for many weeks following, Fogg was kept busy teaching the rudiments of his art.

When the boys rode back to the ranch-house, about midnight, they found Ted and a stranger awaiting their coming. The boys knew at once that this man—who was a long, cadaverous, bewhiskered fellow—must be the unknown, whom they had unwittingly frightened on the trail as they rode out to the coulée in their white shrouds.

"This is Mr. Longnecker," said Ted, ignoring the conscious glances of his friends. "Bud will remember Colonel Blythe having spoken about him. Mr. Longnecker is in trouble, boys, and we can help him. What say?"

"What's the business?" asked Bud promptly.

"It's a Macedonian cry, gentlemen," said the visitor, a nervous person with a high-pitched voice. "We want you to come over into the hills and help us."

"Why, it's allus up to Ted, yuh know," remarked Bud again. "Whatever he says goes with this bunch."

"Betcher life!" agreed Clay, and the others nodded.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLACK BULL AGAIN.

Longnecker's story was briefly told by Ted. The gentleman had, some eight or ten months before, become convinced that there was a quantity of rock-oil, or petroleum, going to waste in his part of the country. He had been moderately successful in sheep raising—therefore being not well liked by his neighbors—but was not satisfied with such slow gains.

There were brooks and ponds on his land which often had upon their surface a scum of oil—sufficient oil, indeed, to burn some time if set afire. Therefore, Mr. Longnecker began to secretly bore his first well.

It wasn't a spouter; but with a powerful pump he managed to pump several gallons a day from it, and it was still in working trim!

So Mr. Longnecker went to work and raised funds, buying all the holdings he could in that range. He forced some small ranchers out, and others, who willingly sold, became "sore" when they learned that the man they thought a fool proved to be so much smarter than themselves.

Others had bored, but with absolutely no success. Longnecker seemed to have bought all the land from which oil could be obtained. At once there was trouble.

But whether the trouble came really through these neighbors who had sold out to him, or from a group of oil men, who had tried to buy Longnecker out, the latter could not tell. All he was sure of, was that his machinery had been injured; that one of his tanks had been set afire, and that his men had been coaxed away, gotten drunk, and frequently either shipped out of the State or shut up in jail for some real or fancied breaking of the law.

"Colonel Blythe wrote to me, and I had heard of you, Mr. Strong, before," said Longnecker. "I am willing to pay you and your men ten dollars a day and found, if you will come over in sufficient force to guard my wells and workmen, and either drive out of the neighborhood the ruffians who disturb me, or get evidence against them that shall make it possible for me to punish them in courts of law."

"Who are the men?"

"I don't know, as I say, whether the cattle men or the

oil buyers are behind these actions. But the fellows who do the damage are a gang of thugs, of whom the leading spirit seems to be a negro, called the Black Bull."

"Hi!" cried Clay. "We know that lad."

"That's the scoundrel that made Stella and little Jacqueline so much trouble over in Soup Kettle Coulée," Ben said.

"And I've a heavy score to settle with the fellow myself," Ted declared. "That's one reason for my looking [illegible] upon Mr. Longnecker's offer."

"I want to go," said Beanpole.

"If there's going to be a scrap, let me in," grunted Kit.

The general opinion seemed to be that the rough riders should go, and [illegible] Mr. Longnecker had added: "A Mounted [illegible]." As it happened, [illegible] could not accompany the gentlemen back, [illegible], and when the party was made up, all the original rough riders could not go.

Carl's sprained foot had grown serious, and he was in Doc Harvey's care. And Beanpole hurt his hand and would be no earthly use in a gun scrimmage. Ted was importuned by Blisters for a chance to accompany the expedition, and the King of the Wild West let Beanpole take Ham Fogg's place, and selected the ex-actor to go because he was a man grown, and his good sense could be depended upon, if not his shooting.

Although, under Bud's tuition, the horse-wrangler had vastly improved in handling both the gun and the rope. The boys all liked him, too.

Stella, having pumped Mr. Longnecker as thoroughly as Longnecker did his oil wells, had learned that there were Mrs. Longnecker and two daughters, and she proposed to ride over with the boys and visit them.

"I'm just longing to meet something new in petticoats!" she declared to Ted. "Alice Harvey sticks so close to her father that she's no fun. And I'm dying of stagnation, anyway."

"You mean that you think there's going to be a scrap, and you want to be in it," returned Ted laughing. "I know you!"

About a week after Longnecker's visit, Ted marshaled his forces and rode over into the hills where the oil men was having seven sorts of trouble. Besides Stella, there rode with the King of the Wild West, Bud, Ben Fairmont, Clay, Kit Summers, Blisters, Jack Slade, and Fogg.

If the latter wasn't to be counted on much in an emergency, he had learned to cook, and they had to camp on the trail for three nights, for they took the road easily. And when they came to Longnecker's land, they did not ride directly to his works, but scouted a good bit first.

It was Bud who first found signs of another party loafing about the hills. He tracked half a dozen ponies into a gully early one morning and, after seeing what was going on there, came in haste to show the other boys the scene.

"Any danger of there being more in the party and we being taken from the rear?" asked Ted.

"Why, I don't know yet if they're queer. Only there's shore a nigger among 'em," said the cowboy.

So the party of rough riders left their horses in a hollow, and found hiding-places along the ridge which hung above the coulée where the party of strangers were.

And what they were about was amply and suddenly made manifest to the spies. A deep and guttural roar—such a sound as can only eminate from one sort of a beast in the Western wilds—shattered the silence of the gully.

"By Jove!" whispered Bud. "That's Ole Ephraim on the rampage!"

"It's a grizzly—sure," admitted Ben.

"Look to your guns, boys. Wish we'd brought rifles," muttered Kit.

"And left Stella behind," whispered Ted in his ear.

Bud, who had the vantage-point for observation, sent back a sharp whisper:

"It's trapped, fellers."

"Sure?"

"Shore's shootin'."

"I see it!" exclaimed Blisters, who had wriggled up to a position equal with Bud's. "It is caught in a steel trap. Thunder! ain't that savage?"

Another roar seemed fairly to shake the hills. The boys and Stella crowded forward to view the bear and the men who had captured it.

The bear seemed caught only by the toes of one hind foot; yet he could not get away. Still he shook the ponderous sixty-pound steel trap as though it weighed no more than a feather, and tugged violently at the chain, in its endeavor to get at the group of men who had ridden into the hollow and picketed their frightened ponies at an easy distance.

"He's sure a buster!" the onlookers heard one of the fellows say.

"That fellow used to be with Shifty Burke—'member him?" whispered Clay to Bud.

"Betcher," was the brief reply.

The fellows' speech could easily be heard by the rough riders, and they discovered that the bunch were "ragging" the negro, and egging him on to do something.

And that negro was surely the Black Bull. Ted and Stella both recognized him, and so did some of the other boys.

"Yuh don't darester do it, Bull," one of the men said, tantalizing the negro, who had evidently become angry at their jokes and chaff.

"Come, Bull! we'll put up a hundred. Le's see yuh stick a knife in that thar b'ar!"

"I dares't! said Bull.

"Do it! do it! don't be four-floushin'."

"Go get him!" urged another, with a loud laugh.

Bull's eyes rolled horribly, until only the whites showed. But despite his evident terror, and after spotting a friendly tree, he pulled himself together with a show of courage and approached the bear.

Mr. Grizzly rose up on his haunches and spread out his arms to embrace him. That bear was sure ready for company!

But Bull dodged and walked gingerly around the bear, endeavoring to approach him from the rear.

"You white mens jest keep him busy in front thar," he said, loud enough for the spectators on the hill to hear.

The men made some diversion at request. Bull ran in, but had not got within five paces of the big brute when the latter whirled like lightning—the celerity of one of these monsters is amazing—and made a lunge at the negro.

The latter uttered a shriek and fled for his tree, with the grizzly after him. Bull, as well as everybody else, believed the grizzly had broke loose, and when the negro reached the tree, he went up it like a scared squirrel.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAD MAN.

But suddenly, the grizzly was brought up short. It was actually the log around which the trap-chain was wrapped, that he had yanked after him. But that log now caught against two trees, and he could go no farther.

The ruffians yelled with laughter. They chaffed the Black Bull unmercifully, but he had been too terrified to come down until the bear was dead.

This was accomplished in a few moments, for it was plain the men feared that the grizzly might yank himself free, and he was certainly an ugly customer.

"Yuh kin come down from thar now, Bull!" yelled one of the fellows.

"Yep. Come on, sonny. What a brave man yuh be—I don't think!"

"He's as dead as Julius Cæsar. Come on!"

Thus they urged the black fellow to descend. And the instant Bull's feet touched the ground, his whole manner was changed into one of ferocious glee.

All the savagery in his nature seemed to be excited—and Bull was of the lowest type of the African race. He danced about the dead grizzly, and sang at the top of his voice—if such savage sounds could be called singing.

His mates proceeded to skin the bear, and all during this business Bull went through the most fantastic antics. He ran his bare arms under the hide up to the shoulder, and into the viscera, covering himself with blood, seemingly to revel in it, as he chanted what must have been "voodoo" melodies. He repeatedly butted the carcass with his head, too.

"That nigger is shore gone crazy," whispered Bud to Ted Strong.

"He's acting funny, that's a fact."

"I always believed he was bug-house," Clay said. "Now I know it. Ugh! what a sight he is."

But the men with the negro seemed to pay little attention to his actions. They were evidently used to his peculiarities.

Meanwhile Ted and Bud were discussing what had best be done.

"They're sure a tough-looking lot of citizens," Bud declared. "We better gather 'em in jest on gineral principals."

"We can't do that. We've no right to arrest peaceable people. These fellows, as far as we personally know, are doing no harm at present——"

"That big nigger has done harm enough."

"But if we take him, the others will be put on their guard, and we want to gather the whole bunch in, if they are the fellows who have been making Longnecker trouble."

"Holy Hamilton!" exclaimed Clay Whipple suddenly. "Look yonder, boys! Now there'll be some fun."

Stella uttered a stifled scream when she saw what had attracted Clay's attention, and the others were aghast—for the moment too startled to move.

Down into the little valley, from the opposite ridge, charged an object which looked to be the incarnation of fury. Huge as was the creature's body, its activity was wonderful. It galloped down upon the group of men about the half-skinned body of the dead grizzly, with the speed of a deer!

"It's her mate, by thunder!" exclaimed Bud Morgan, half rising from his place of concealment.

"Lay low!" advised Kit. "Let 'em fight their own battles."

And that the men below were fully alive to the situation was apparent. At least, all but the negro seemed aware of the peril which menaced them.

The second grizzly was after vengeance for its mate's killing—or had some private revenge to work out. With slobbering jaws, which emitted thunderous growls at every jump the bear made, the beast came down straight upon the group. And they scattered like chaff!

It was a moment, however, before Black Bull seemed to realize the danger. He stood up, a gory and awful object, and stared gibberingly at the on-coming grizzly. But his appearance did not affright bruin. Thinking itself confronted with a worthy enemy, the beast, with a louder roar, charged full at the negro!

[illegible] the man would [illegible] brute's [illegible] transfixed, the long [illegible] hand, [illegible] though [illegible] charge. [illegible] comrade's [illegible] tried [illegible] began a [illegible]

[illegible] has [illegible] with [illegible] all [illegible] to reach a vital [illegible]

[illegible] so [illegible] to get in a [illegible]

[illegible] at [illegible] the [illegible] of the bear. It was [illegible] from [illegible] by the [illegible] grizzly.

[illegible] and [illegible] the [illegible] the [illegible] bear. [illegible] it [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible], came [illegible] the [illegible].

[illegible] as a huge ape, and looking [illegible] hands [illegible] and [illegible] turned [illegible] shoulder as he [illegible] enemy.

[illegible] and [illegible] and [illegible] his huge [illegible] his [illegible] tracks.

When they saw that [illegible] the [illegible], they all made for the [illegible] Canon. So did Black Bull. So did the cowpuncher!

The white men freed their mounts with much difficulty, but managed to scramble aboard them, and spur away. The negro, covered with the blood of the bear, could not get within reach of his own horse. No horse, no matter how well trained, will stand for the odor of a bear.

Bull's mount reared up, struck out with his four feet, snapped his picket, and ran to the end of his picket rope. [illegible] Bull and the [illegible] bear [illegible] rope. [illegible] the negro could [illegible] the saddle, the frightened horse broke the rope and with a loud squeal ran away at top speed.

The negro was left there alone with the grizzly [illegible] and with only a knife for a weapon—in the bottom of [illegible]. The white men had [illegible] red out of danger, [illegible] wise, out of safe rifle-shot. That [illegible] followed happened so quickly, and was such a [illegible] and bear, that it was unsafe to try to get in a single shot.

When the negro's horse broke away, the man seemed dazed. He halted abruptly, and the bear came on with a roar that sounded exultant.

But at the [illegible] moment the beast dealt a blow at Bull, with his [illegible] paw, the negro slipped aside. The blow fell glancingly. Bull was knocked several yards away, and his shoulder was fearfully gashed by the claws of the beast; but when he struck the earth, he bounded up again, like an India-rubber man!

It was his left shoulder that was hurt, and the crazed negro did not seem to notice it. He still clutched the long knife in his right hand, and for a moment it looked as though—gone completely mad—the fellow would cast himself with that naked blade upon his ursine antagonist!

CHAPTER XIV.

A HELPING HAND.

Meanwhile, and although the time occupied by these events was brief indeed, all the spectators of the tragic happenings were neither idle nor helpless. The same idea had inspired both Ted Strong and Bud Morgan.

They had leaped up from their place of concealment and run to the horses, which they had left picketed not far away. It took but half a minute to untie and mount these, and they galloped back, up the slope, and over the ridge, side by side.

As they came upon the scene again, Black Bull had just been knocked down by the grizzly. Neither the men who had been the negro's companions, nor the rough riders on the hill-top, dared fire a shot at the bear. There was too much danger of hitting the man instead. Man and beast were at terribly close quarters.

The appearance of the King of the Wild West and the cow-puncher, spurring down the hill toward the negro and the bear, held Bull's friends transfixed. As for the negro, he did not see them coming. He saw nothing but the grizzly.

Half a dozen times his agility was all that saved the negro from death. And with every failure, the grizzly's rage rose higher. Its roars shook the little valley, and were the most awful sounds Bud or Ted had ever heard.

If the negro's attention was entirely taken up with the bear, so was the latter devoting himself strictly to the negro. Ted and Bud rode down upon them without either of the antagonists being aware of their approach.

Again and again the bear struck at the negro, and the latter dodged, or slipped away. But this could not last for long. The bear was bound to get in a true blow finally.

To show how mad was the black man, it became evi-

dent that he was trying for a chance to drive his knife into the grizzly! And which of the two—the man or the bear—was the more terrible sight, it would be hard to state.

Ted and Bud spurred their horses, one to either side of the fighting couple. They did not draw their guns, but both unslung their lariats, and the serpentine coils whirled over the bear.

As their frightened ponies passed on the dead run, one on either side, the ropes settled. The bear was upon his haunches, swinging his forearms like the walking-beam of a steamboat.

Ted's rope dropped over the left arm, and Bud's over the right. Before the big beast realized that he had other antagonists than the jumping, chattering black man, the nooses tightened and the horses jerked him forward, flat upon his nose!

The two rough riders gave him no chance to get upon his legs. They rode off at right angles with his body, and the trembling ponies kept the strong ropes taut.

The grizzly was down upon his breast and nose, his fore-legs pulled painfully out from his body, holding him helpless, roaring and gnashing his teeth!

With a wild yell Bull, who saw what had been done to his enemy, capered high in his fiendish glee, and before the boys could stop him, the mad negro leaped upon the bear from the rear.

He actually bestrode the brute, thrusting again and again with his knife into the huge body. Roars of agony from the bear and maniacal yells from Bull were intermingled.

Suddenly, in thrusting so wildly, Bull's knife chanced to cut Ted Strong's rope!

Ted's pony almost went over backwards, and the King of the Wild West came near tumbling out of his saddle. Bud uttered a shout of warning, and the bear, with final desperate strength, scrambled to his feet again.

Bull was riding him as though he were a horse. The bear turned his great head to seize the negro; but the latter, raising the dripping blade, brought it down with great force, just under the armpit.

The blood gushed from the grizzly's jaws, and he pitched forward on his nose again. Bull leaped away with a shriek of delighted satisfaction, and even Bud could not repress a cheer. Ole Ephraim was the deadest kind of a dead bear!

But the negro needed the attention of the two rough riders. Finding himself unpursued by his enemy, and although bleeding profusely from the gashes in his shoulder, the Bull sprang back upon the carcass, and yelling loudly his mad songs, thrust, and thrust, and thrust into the shaggy body.

"Get out of that, yuh blamed fool!" yelled Bud, riding as close as his pony would go to the dead bear. "You're spiling that hide."

Ted leaped from his pony and picketed the animal so that he would not run. He walked forward, and spoke to Bull.

"That's no way for a man to act," he said. "Get away from that carcass? Put up your knife."

The negro leaped up, standing upon the body, and flourished his blade, yelling horribly. He was as mad as any maniac in the State asylum.

"Get away f'om yere, w'ite man! Ah got ma revenge! Ah got ma revenge!"

"You'll git a dose of cold lead if yuh don't behave," gritted Bud angrily.

Ted lifted his head and made Bud a sign. The cowboy carried a second rope, and in a minute he uncoiled this and cast it unerringly over the darkey's head. The noose fell over the Bull's shoulders and pinioned his arms. A stout jerk dragged the man over backwards, and for a moment he was helpless upon the grass.

Ted ran in and cast off Bud's other noose from the bear. The cowboy wheeled his pony and dragged the negro at a sharp clip over the ground.

At this an angry shout arose from the white men, who had been Bull's companions, but who had left him to fight the grizzly alone. They spurred back into the little vale, believing that Ted and Bud were alone. There were five of these ruffians, beside the negro.

"What are yuh doin' with that nigger?" the foremost rider bawled. "Let him go!"

Ted stepped back to his pawing pony and mounted into the saddle, coiling up his lariat.

"We want that man," he said quietly. "Besides, he is evidently insane. It would be dangerous to allow him at large."

"Who th' dickens are you?" demanded the first speaker, with an oath, yet reining in his horse as he noted Ted Strong's determined attitude.

The man that Clay had recognized as having once been of Shifty Burke's gang of outlaws rode up to his leader quickly and whispered something in his ear.

"So that's who th' cuss is, heh?" demanded the ruffian. "Ted Strong, eh? Well, Mr. Ted Strong, what air yuh doin' over yere?"

"Just at present, sir," replied Ted quietly, "I am exercising my right as a United States marshal to arrest that negro."

"Oh, yuh be, heh?"

"I am. He is wanted in my county for misdemeanor—I'm not sure but that we can punish him for assault with intent to kill. Besides, as I say, he is a bad man to have at large."

"Mebbe you're a bad man to have at large, too!" growled the other.

"I presume I am so considered—by such men as yourself," said Ted coolly.

The five rode together swiftly. Then they suddenly [illegible] their ponies and began to spread out. Evidently they intended to surround Ted and Bud, with their prisoner.

But had paid no attention, whatsoever, to the talk going on between his chief and the quintet of ruffians. He had really dismounted, and now had the Black Bull neatly tied, wrists and ankles, and his arms strapped to his sides. Bud looked, too, as though he thought some of gagging the negro to stop the torrent of violent language which flowed from him.

Ted, seeing what his enemies intended, spoke to Sultan quietly. The black horse began to back and, with scarcely any [illegible] from his rider, drew nearer to Bud and the [illegible].

"No violence, gentlemen," said Ted, while his mount [illegible] this maneuver. "I warn you that I am legally within my rights, and that if you interfere, you are running counter to the Federal government."

"To Halifax with your government!" shouted the leader of the gang. "Let that nigger go!"

"I absolutely refuse to do so."

"It will be the worse for you if you don't."

"It will be far worse for you if you attempt to make me," declared Ted sternly.

"We're five to your two."

"I would not care if you were fifty to one. You are laying yourselves liable to arrest."

"Nah! Hear the fool!" sneered the man.

"Never judge an opponent unworthy because of his youth," said Ted sternly. "I have nothing actually against you men now, but if you interfere I shall take every man jack of you to jail!"

At this bold declaration the gang hooted with laughter, and at a word from their leader suddenly spurred their horses forward, evidently determined to attack the two rough riders and free their captive.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE HANDS OF A MANIAC.

Bud, seeing the rush, leaped upon his pony's back again. The Black Bull could not move, and the two rough riders drew their mounts close to him, defending him from any rescue by the gang.

The latter now had slung their rifles into position, and now their leader threatened the two young men with actual death.

"Fade away, you kids!" he shouted. "You-uns have struck the wrong range."

"Don't believe it. You're makin' a mistake, mister," said Bud, though neither he nor Ted made a motion to pull their guns.

"I'll make a mistake an' blow yuh ornery head off yuh shoulders, yuh long-haired son-of-a-gun!"

Suddenly Ted lifted his hand. The five desperadoes pulled in their ponies, startled by the signal.

"Who's them?" yelled one of the fellows, pointing to the hill above.

"Always be sure you know the strength of the enemy before you tackle them," said Ted calmly. "Now, hadn't you better take my advice and run away?"

Along the top of the hill appeared seven mounted figures, and the sunlight flashed upon the weapons in their hands. Their horses were trotting quickly toward the group in the valley.

"By the eternal, boys!" exclaimed the leader of the ruffians. "They've got reenforcements."

"And they outnumber us. Come on!" shouted another, turning his horse sharply around.

His flight was imitated by the others in a hurry. They paid no further attention to the bound negro, but spurred away, quickly mounting the opposite ridge, and disappearing from view.

"I'm mighty sorry we had to show our hand and let them get away from us," said Ted, as the other boys and Stella rode down to them. "But this black fellow had to be looked after."

"I don't know but we made a mistake in not letting that grizzly chaw him up," declared Bud gloomily.

"You bloodthirsty fellow! If we believed you were as bad as you make off you are, Bud," cried Stella, "we wouldn't dare have you in the rough riders."

"Well, but what will we do with this fellow?" demanded Kit ruefully.

"Clay, you and Blisters ride back and bring up the packhorses. Those scamps may circle around and grab our camp equipment. We'll tie Bull on one of the packers and take him over to Longnecker. If he can get testimony to convict the scamp of malicious mischief that will help us put him away where the dogs won't bite him. If ever I saw a maniac, that fellow is one!"

Ted's commands were always obeyed promptly and without question. That there could be but one head to the rough rider's organization, and that his judgment must be accepted at all times as final, was a rule well understood.

The packhorses were brought up, and the load of one divided among the boys. The Black Bull's feet were unfastened, he was raised upon the horse, and then a strap run from ankle to ankle beneath the animal's belly.

The negro was not a peaceable endurer of these indignities. He strained at his straps, his eyes rolled insanely, and he used such language that finally Ted threatened to gag him and showed him a piece of wood and a handkerchief with which to perform that unpleasant operation.

The Bull was not so crazy that he could not understand what was said to him. He saw that Ted meant

what he said, and with the usual cunning of the insane patient, quieted down after that and rode in the midst of the cavalcade without raising further objection.

The boys were still some miles from Mr. Longnecker's place, and from the oil-boring operations. They could not possibly reach the gentleman's headquarters before night.

Besides, thinking it too bad to lose two such fine bear-skins, Ted allowed Bud and Clay, with some help from Jack Slate, to skin the dead grizzlies. These pelts added to the burdens of the ponies—and they had a nice time getting them upon the animals bestrode by Bud and Clay—the cavalcade went on but slowly.

Ted ordered a sharp watch to be kept for the men who had been with the negro. Although they had ridden off in so much apparent fright, they might trail the rough riders at a distance and seek to do them some injury when least looked for.

So the party did not make Longnecker's ranch-house that night, but camped in a wooded district where a steep and rocky hillside defended their camp from the rear, and there was a deep creek in front.

Ted had hastily bound up the Bull's wounded shoulder; but now he stripped the man's torn shirt from the place, washed the gashes thoroughly that no foreign matter might remain in the wound and make trouble, and then Bud produced some home-made salve and they bound the fellow's arm and shoulder in scientific manner.

While they were about it they washed the man's arms and trunk free of the dried blood of the bear, and other foulness. Bull looked on in silence, and said nothing, only asking that his wrists might be fastened in front, because when they were held behind him they strained open his wounds and made the blood flow again.

This seemed a reasonable request and Ted agreed to it. He even allowed the Bull's wrists to be unfastened while he ate, although his ankles remained tied, and one of the boys sat directly behind the negro with a cocked revolver in his lap.

"I'm taking no chances with the fellow," Ted said, when Stella laughed at him for all these precautions.

"Why, he couldn't get away from us nine."

"You never know what a mad man can do."

"He doesn't seem very crazy now. He's peaceful enough."

"That's his cunning."

Yet most of the others thought that Ted's extreme precaution was unnecessary.

"I don't wish to have to shoot the fellow to save any of our lives," Ted said seriously. "He's a bloody-minded fellow, mad for killing, and may break out again at any moment. And you can make up your mind that he doesn't love any of us."

"Why should he?" muttered Stella. "It's too bad, I say, for him to be tied so tightly."

"Don't let your sympathy get the better of your good sense and try to loosen up his bonds," Ted returned, with a laugh.

He hadn't the least idea that she would do such a thing. But late in the evening Stella heard the Bull groaning, and she went over to him and asked him if he were in pain.

"Yaas, missy; I in much pain—shore!" declared the black man, rolling his eyes.

"Where?"

"Dese hyar cords do cut intuh ma flesh mighty sharp, missy," said the black man, lifting his wrists so that she could see how tight the bonds were.

"That's a shame!" muttered Stella, seeing how the flesh of his wrists was swollen about the thongs.

"They do hurt powerful, missy," whined the negro.

Now Stella had no reason for being lenient with the Black Bull. He had once endeavored to kill her when she was hiding little Jasper Rider in the Soup Kettle Coulée; but she was tender-hearted toward all creatures, either good or bad, human or dumb!

So what does Miss Stella do but go to the creek and bring water with which to bathe the Black Bull's wrists. She wouldn't loosen the bonds—oh, no! Ted had told her not to touch them.

But when she brought the bucket of water the Bull plunged both his hands and wrists into the cool liquid with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Dat all right, missy. Jes' yo' leab it yere. Mebbe massa' Cap'n not like yo' tuh do hit for me, an' I wash 'em masel'."

So Stella, her heart warmed by the knowledge of a good deed done, stole back to her place about the camp-fire. They had given the Bull a blanket. Whenever one of the boys went over to see if he was all right, the Bull managed to hide the bucket by pulling a corner of the blanket over it.

And he had been fastened so securely that none of his captors tried his bonds. Meanwhile the Black Bull was soaking his hands and wrists, and—necessarily, the bonds. And those bonds were thongs of rawhide!

The natural consequence? Ah! that did not appear until morning. The camp was guarded during the night, but the guards did not examine Bull any more closely than had Ted before he turned in.

Stella awoke just before daybreak. She had a tiny shelter tent which Ted usually packed with the other camp equipment when she was along. She peered out from under the flap and found that the little valley was just growing gray.

Jack Slate was standing back to a big tree, nodding, half-asleep. Then she saw that the horses seemed to have strayed some distance from the encampment. She could hear their stamping and nibbling at the grass, but the morning mist hid them.

It struck her that a sharp run on Contrary before breakfast would be a most refreshing experience, and she crept out and ran away without even rousing the sleepy Jack.

She did not even think of the Black Bull. Certainly she did not look in the direction of the place where he had been tied, with his feet to a stake driven into the earth. And she was among the ponies and seeking her own Contrary before she realized that a huge, lumbering figure was likewise in the bunch.

"Who's that? Is it Ben?" she cried, not imagining who else the big man could be, although Lazybones was not the fellow to leave his comfortable blanket so early in the morning if he could help it.

At her call the figure turned swiftly, struck a couple of ponies resounding wallops with a quirt, and then sprang to her side. He led Ben's big mount, Gringo. The other horses startled by his actions, and evidently freed of their bridles, scurried off at a lope.

"Ah, lemme yuh, miss! Yuh wanna go wid me, eh?" cried the fellow, and with a shriek Stella recognized the Black Bull.

Patiently the captive had soaked his bonds until the leather softened, becoming pliable. It was then a small matter for him to slip off the wrist-lashings and work over those which bound his ankles to the stake. He had selected this hour of the morning—when people usually sleep the most soundly—for an attempt to stampede the ponies and get away himself.

And he was successful—more than successful, indeed. Here was Stella as a hostage to his hand. With a yell of triumph which roused the whole camp, the maniac seized the girl, leaped upon Gringo's back, and, giving him the rein, the big horse dashed up the hillside and was out of sight before the boys understood what had occurred.

CHAPTER XVI.

STELLA'S PERIL.

Ted Strong was an exceedingly temperate fellow as to most things. Especially was this so in his actions and words. It was by self-control that he was able to so well control the other boys with him.

But when he was awakened by Stella's scream, and hurried up to hear ringing through the glade the wild yell of the escaped maniac, Black Bull, his rage mastered him for the moment.

It did not threaten himself, and Ted would meet the situation calmly. Let danger come nigh Stella Fosdick, his little friend and the rough riders' mascot, and Ted was stirred to the depths of his being!

"How'd that devil get free?" he shouted.

Nobody could answer that at the moment.

"Where are the ponies?" he shouted again.

"They've stampeded, Ted," returned Ben, already running after the retreating animals.

"After them, boys! Who's on guard?"

Ted asked this question as he ran along the creek bank. He came plump upon Jack Slate still rubbing his eyes.

"It's—it's—why, how'd he get away?" demanded Jack, forgetting to drawl in his surprise.

Several of the better trained horses came back when they heard their masters calling—notably Sultan, Clay's flea-bitten gray, and the horse Bud bestrode. The three saddled up, and mounting, rode away instantly on Gringo's trail, leaving the other fellows to collect the scattered herd and follow more leisurely.

Nothing but a half-wild horse like Gringo could have mounted the hill at the pace it had gone—and with a double burden. But Ted spared Sultan not at all, and Clay and Bud were close upon his trail.

The hoof-marks of the big stallion were plain. The trio raced over the hill and found that, perhaps by accident, the Bull had struck a rather good trail leading north. None of the trio knew where it led; but as long as Gringo had turned that way, and the negro held Stella prisoner, they were game for the chase.

But the stallion was not in sight. He had now some twenty minutes' lead. Having struck a good trail, even Sultan could scarcely overtake him unless through some accident.

"Hold up!" commanded Ted, who was cooling down. "This will never do. Let's go about the matter right."

"Lord! if I git sight o' that scoundrel——"

"Oh, yes; you'll take a pot shot at him," said Ted. "But we haven't got sight of him, Bud, and the girl's in danger. Let's be sensible."

"Well?" demanded Clay. "What about it?"

"It's going to be a long chase. It's bound to be."

"What, with him riding double?" asked Bud.

"Yes. He's so crazy he won't save the horse a mite. I bet when Ben gets Gringo back the poor creature won't be worth the price of old bones."

"What shall we do?"

"You go back to the camp, Clay, and as fast as the boys round up the ponies, send them up here. Make that blamed Jack Slate—if I didn't drown him—make some coffee. Bring back a can, and let the boys eat as best they can before they start. And let 'em each pack a snack for the trail.

"Let Ben stay with Jack and guard camp and keep a watch out for those other fellows who were with the Bull. Ben's horse is gone, and he's too heavy for the other ponies.

"The rest of you get back here as soon as possible. Bud and I will wait for you on the trail."

"Aye, aye, colonel!" returned Clay, and rode away.

Meanwhile, as Ted was collecting his forces for the

chase, what had happened to Stella? That she was in singular peril there could be no doubt.

She had no doubt of it herself when she found that she could not struggle out of the Black Bull's arms. He was a giant in strength, anyway, and now in his mad state that natural strength was vastly increased.

He laid Stella before him on the saddle which he had stolen from the pile by the camp and cinched Gringo's barrel. The big stallion plunged up the hill and over the rise snorting with anger and terror.

Stella saw that to try to fling herself from the back of the horse, though she might be successful, would endanger her life. And she preferred to risk what might come in the future rather than court certain death on this rocky hill.

Gringo was really only half-tamed. He was not a bucking horse; but only under Ben Tremont's hand did he act well. Now he thought he was running away, but as he ran just in the direction Bull wanted him to, the negro was likewise delighted.

The man yelled and shouted at first, as though quite beside himself. But as the horse struck the smoother trail and settled into a steady gallop, the negro grew quiet.

He shifted Stella to a more comfortable position. He saw that her eyes were open, and he grinned down at her.

"Lil' miss' jes' do what she told an' nawthin' happen tuh her—mebbe," he said.

But his words and manner were not encouraging. However, Stella had no intention of making her lot harder by trying to escape from his clutch while the horse was thundering on.

Despite the heavy burden he bore, Gringo seemed tireless. His hoofs hammered the hard trail at a steady pace, and that a fast one. Bull neither urged nor retarded him—let him have his head, indeed. The big horse was striding away into the north, and believed he was going at his own sweet will.

As Ted had foreseen, Bull did not seek to retard the animal's pace in the least. He was too mad to realize that the horse would go on, and on, until he broke down. Gringo was that kind.

But Stella realized it; and she wondered what would be done with her when the horse had foundered and could carry them no farther?

Bull was muttering to himself, or singing his wild voodoo melodies all the time. He paid little attention to her excepting to hold her upon the saddle with one brawny arm.

She grew very wearied and not a little sick to her stomach as hour after hour passed, and there seemed no let-up to this race. They did not leave the beaten trail, but neither did they pass a living person or sight a human habitation.

Gringo stumbled once, and then decreased his speed. Bull did not urge him for some time, but continued to croon to himself, and gripped the girl firmly.

Otherwise she had come to that pass that she would have risked leaping to the ground. Had she been armed she would have actually tried to shoot her captor. But she had left her pistol and belt in the tent back at the night camp.

On and on Gringo went, but now he was showing much fatigue; yet when he would have stopped, Bull spurred him on. And he spurred him so cruelly that the blood dripped from the poor creature's flanks.

The spur kept him going at a wild pace for another hour. Then it was plain that the beast was done for. He did not respond to the spur. He labored terribly; his breathing had become a groaning sound.

But here the cunning of the maniac showed itself again in Bull's course. He did not let the horse stop, but he swung his right leg over the saddle, freed his left foot from that stirrup, and, holding Stella tight in his arms, leaped far out from the trail, alighting on the grass where his footprints would not be noticed so easily.

Then he swung about instantly, and with his quirt reached the staggering Gringo with a sharp cut of the lash.

Relieved of his burden and stung by this cut, the horse picked his feet up and galloped away with renewed vigor. He was quickly out of sight around a turn in the trail. Bull set Stella down, but, holding her hand, dragged her up into the rocks that here rose like a pile of overturned city houses upon the mountainside.

Stella was terribly frightened, and she was well-nigh overcome with weariness, too; but she would not cry, and it was useless to shriek for help. She kept her wits about her, however.

As Bull dragged her on she saw that the course he was taking could be seen from the trail for some distance. There was no pursuit in sight; but she knew that Ted and her other friends could not mistake such a plain trail.

As Bull dragged her on she tore the cuff from one of her jacket sleeves and dropped it on the mountainside. It had beads upon it that glistened in the sunlight, and she knew it could be seen from the path below. Bull did not notice this act, however.

Later she dropped her handkerchief; then she stepped into a soft piece of ground and so left the plain print of her foot. So, as she was forced on, she left guiding marks at every opportunity.

She thought the mad man would never stop for rest; but at last he did. She was so wearied that she dropped down and fell asleep. She did not even remember that she was faint for lack of food, or that every minute she was alone with this negro she was in danger of her life. Outraged nature demanded that she rest, and rest she did.

[illegible] terror. What it was that had so frightened her she could not imagine until she tried to rise. Then she found that while she slept the negro had tied her hand and foot.

She lay upon a steep hillside, and the sun was already [illegible]ing toward the west. Across a deep valley she saw [illegible]ant houses and several gigantic, straddling framework edifices which, at first, she could not imagine the use of.

Then it smote her troubled mind suddenly that they [illegible]k the situation of the borings for oil which Mr. Longnecker had begun. She was not many miles from the place.

Suddenly a shadow was flung across her. She looked up to see Black Bull grinning down upon her. And, [illegible] of horrors! what was it he held in his hands?

She shrieked with terror. The black man laughed outright and advanced the horrid, writhing thing toward her.

It was a big rattlesnake, its deadly forked tongue darting in and out, its buttoned tail striving to wind itself [illegible] the negro's brawny arm!

[illegible] behind the head with one [illegible]b and forefinger. With the other hand he held the snake's body. He came nearer, and Stella bit her lower lip till the blood came to keep from shrieking again.

She thought he had brought it to her to frighten her. She did not realize the mad man's intention.

[illegible] two forked sticks. He placed the snake on the ground carefully and drove these two forks into the ground, one directly behind its head and the other farther down the body so that it could not coil. But its rattle was insistent, and if ever there was an outraged and angry snake it was this one.

[illegible] though she was, Stella shrank away from the vicinity of the serpent. Bull yelled delightedly when he saw this.

Having fixed the snake to his satisfaction, he seized the girl roughly. Her right sleeve—the one from which she had torn the cuff—lay nearest the snake. The fellow, with teeth and finger nails, tore the entire sleeve of her coat away, and then ripped off the sleeve of the garment beneath. Her right arm was bared to the shoulder.

Then he seized her and dragged her toward the snake. At this the poor girl found her voice. She shrieked and [illegible] and [illegible] with him; but the negro drowned her [illegible] in demoniac laughter, and proceeded to his fiendish plan.

He staked her down to the ground, with a stake at each ankle and one upon either side of her throat. A [illegible] drawn piece of [illegible]—part of his own bonds of the night before—drawn from one of these last stakes to its mate kept her head fastened to the ground and made it impossible for her to see much on either side of her.

She could not tell how near the rattlesnake was to her bared arm; but she heard the whir of its rattles and knew that it must be near. And she could not move from it a single inch!

She was staked here, and the snake was staked down, too. But how long before the writhings of the serpent would set it free? And when it was free Stella knew well that she would be the first object upon which it would wreck its wrath!

CHAPTER XVII.

HERE FOGG CAME IN.

The cavalcade of rough riders, with Ted Strong at their head, had toiled all day along the trail. As the King of the Wild West had said in the beginning, it proved a long chase.

And the horrible part of it was, they did not know, whenever they came to a turn in the path, that they might not find Stella's dead or mutilated body lying beside the way.

Bull's object in carrying her away they could not fathom. Who can understand the vagaries of an addled brain? That she was in peril was enough for her friends to put forth every effort to find her.

No horse but Gringo had been over the trail before them for some hours; it was easy to follow his hoof-marks. The abductor of their little chum had not branched off from the straight path.

"That Gringo hawse suttenly is a wonder," grunted Bud, toward noon, when by the hoof-marks the big stallion seemed to be running about as well as he had at first.

"There's blood on the path," said Ted, who rode ahead.

"Reckon that black fiend's wounds have opened again."

"No. It's on both sides of the horse-track. He's spurring Gringo to keep him up."

"Jumping sand-hills!" cried Bud, with vigor. "We got him then."

But they had not caught their quarry so easily. Gringo had galloped on for some miles under stress of spur. And then, suddenly, as though taking his second wind, he had shot on even faster!

"That hawse is shore a wonder!" Bud Morgan kept repeating.

Hamilton Fogg, who had had very little to say during the entire ride, but whose fears for Stella's safety was none the less acute because he had not known her so long as the boys, finally pressed up to Ted's level.

"Is mica very common in these hills, Mr. Strong?" he asked.

"What's that?" asked Ted sternly, jarred by the seemingly foreign question—foreign to the serious business in hand.

"Ising-glass, or mica, or any shining mineral? Is it common among these rocks?"

"Not that I know of. What do you mean?"

"And naturally there are not many picnicing parties who would be likely to throw away broken china, or glass?"

"See here! what's got into your bonnet?"

"Why," said Fogg, still hesitatingly, "I remember that Miss Stella had some bead trimming on her jacket, and up on the sidehill back there a piece I saw something sparkling in the grass."

At that moment a shout from Bud attracted the attention of everybody, even of Ted. The cow-puncher was pointing ahead.

There, quietly feeding in a little hollow beside the trail, was poor Gringo, covered with sweat, and his flanks caked with dust and blood. Evidently he had been off the trail for some time.

"By thunder! Ben's hawse is done for," Clay declared.

"Where's the girl and that nigger?" demanded Blisters.

Ted turned suddenly to Fogg.

"Whereabouts did you see that thing glittering in the grass?" he demanded.

The horse wrangler told him.

"Boys, I believe we've been fooled by that black scoundrel," exclaimed the King of the Wild West. "You stay here, Bud—and keep Clay with you—and see if you can find their trail. But the rest of us will ride back. I believe that Black Bull and Stella left the horse some ways back. That's what made him run so much better for a time."

The party divided, and those with Ted loped back along the trail. Their own mounts were pretty well winded now, and they had to go slowly.

Fogg had a good bump of locality. He picked out the spot unerringly. Although the situation of the sun was different from what it had been when they passed before, the ex-actor found a spot from which they could see the object on the hillside glisten.

"May be nothing in it; but come, fellows. Blisters, you stay and watch the horses," said Ted, springing off.

He, with Kit and Fogg started up the hill. They found the torn cuff Stella had dropped and knew that they were on the trail.

But without turning back to call the other boys the trio kept straight up the mountain, picking up clues to the path followed by the negro and his prisoner at every few rods.

By and by they, too, came out upon the plateau from which they could see the derricks and other buildings of Longnecker's oil-borings.

And they saw something else, too. Below them, on the hillside, there was the figure of poor Stella staked to the earth, and the big negro sitting beside her, gloating over his fiendish work.

"She's dead!" groaned Kit.

"No, she's not," Fogg said. "I am sure she is alive. I have good eyesight. I can see her chest heaving even at this distance."

Indeed, Stella was straining with all her strength to break the bonds which held her, while Bull sat a little distance away, chuckling insanely at her efforts.

"Yo' cyan't do it, missy! yo' cyan't do it 'fore dat snake, he git free. He git free fust. He! he! He git free, fust."

Had Ted been more of a bloodthirsty individual the incident might have ended differently. But when he saw Kit raise his gun and draw bead on Bull, he motioned him to desist.

"Take him alive," he whispered.

The three crept down toward the exulting negro. But Fogg was not used to work like this and he inadvertently set a stone to rolling. Bull looked up and saw the trio coming.

He leaped up with an awful yell. At first they thought he would run; but then he leaped toward the prostrate Stella.

"Quick! before he hurts her!" roared Ted, and, yanking out his gun, fired from the hip; but it was a bad shot.

Kit was equally unfortunate. As for Fogg, he rushed at the negro and never thought to draw his gun.

Bull reached Stella, but he did not touch her. It was Fogg that first saw what the fiend was about. He beheld the writhing snake.

Bull kicked out one of the forked sticks; but the other was too securely fixed. He stooped and seized it with his hand, and, as he wrenched it from the hard soil, he stumbled and fell upon his hands and knees just over the big serpent!

Like lightning the rattlesnake struck—and its fangs reached the negro's hand. He uttered a yell, leaped up, and fled down the hillside.

And then the snake struck a second time.

Its poison glands were still well supplied with venom, and its fangs sunk into Stella's bared arm!

Fogg shrieked aloud, leaped over the prostrate girl, and, before the snake could coil, landed upon it in his heavy boots and stamped its wicked head to jelly!

But Stella had been bitten. All three had been close enough at the end to see it. She had fainted as the snake struck, and lay like a white wax-figure upon the hillside.

"Ted!" cried Kit Summers, almost weeping, "she's a dead girl."

"No, no!" cried Ted; yet for the moment he lost his self-control and was as helpless as Kit.

It was Fogg who really knew what to do, and who recovered first from the horror which gripped all three.

Cutting the things which bound the girl's hands and feet, he bound her arm just above and below the tiny wound—the two pin-pricklike holes—which the snake's fangs had made.

"Gentlemen, it is too bad we haven't some whisky with us, but I see houses over yonder. How far away is it?"

"Too far to do right with," declared Kit hopelessly.

"I believe we can save her. I can carry her myself. Unless you go back for the horses and bring them around into this valley. Perhaps there is a path."

"I'll get them!" shouted Kit, starting on the back track at once.

With scarcely a word to each other Fogg and Ted toiled down the mountain with the unconscious girl. When one was exhausted the other relieved him, and so they came to the valley.

A little later the entire party of rough riders that had been sent after Bull and Stella entered the valley. Ted mounted Stella, and carrying Stella before him on the saddle they hurried on toward the oil wells.

It was a pretty grim party that finally arrived at Longnecker's plant. And there they found that there wasn't such a thing as a drop of liquor within ten miles! Longnecker had refused to allow it in the camp for fear his men would get to rioting about the wells and do some damage.

But here Fogg came out strong again. He heard the exhaust of a gas-engine in one of the pumping-buildings. He ran and found that there was a suction gas-pump.

Seizing Stella from Ted's arms, he ran to the building and placed the wound in her arm over the end of the pipe which takes in the air and held it there several minutes.

Meanwhile Blisters, on a fresh horse, rode to the Longnecker house for remedies, and when he returned they were applied.

But the suction-pump had removed most of the poison, and they unbound Stella's arm. The after-effects of her terrible adventure were small.

Three days later the rough riders found the body of the Black Bull, horribly swollen, in the forest. He had died of the rattlesnake bite. And, at least, he would not be troubling the oil-pumpers again!

THE END.

"King of the Wild West's Outlaw; or, Stella to the Rescue," is the title of the story in next week's issue, No. 134.

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank Merriwell's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We wish to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in Tip Top and in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150, entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in Tip Top up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is packed with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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A CHAT WITH YOU.

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I am a stenographer in the Norfolk [illegible] I have a number of small books [illegible] fine books of all kinds, but when I [illegible] is real exciting, I just go to my [illegible] numbers of the ROUGH RIDER or *Tip Top* [illegible] I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY i[illegible] kind published. *Tip Top* is another [illegible] different from any other book that are publishe[illegible] Read a *Tip Top* or a ROUGH RIDER [illegible] game of football, which is, in my [illegible] the world. *Tip Top* is the [illegible] because it ha[illegible] football and baseball ste[illegible] ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY [illegible] because it pictures the [illegible] tells about the brave cowboys and [illegible] In other [illegible] it is the best paper of its kind in all the [illegible]

Roanoke, Va. GEO. C. FRIEND.

Why is it that people instinctively take up a copy of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY or *Tip Top* when they desire something particularly good to read? The secret is that they know that they will not be disappointed in finding a story that never fails to interest.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best published. I admire all the characters, but Ted Strong particularly.

New Orleans, La. A. SINCL[illegible]

You show that, in admiring Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, you appreciate the noble qualities of the young men of America as they are reflected in such a character.

(A letter from Virginia.)

I have been reading ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for about nine months, and I like them better than any Wild West story pu[illegible]lished. I have read other stories of the West, but none can compare with the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. I like No. 120 as well as any number I have read of ROUGH RIDER. Ted Strong and his comrades are heroes. They have got plenty of nerve and grit. C. P. ELLIOTT.

Nerve and grit! That's it! The young rough riders have plenty, and display these qualities in such a way that we cannot help say that their conduct is heroic.

I have always liked the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and consider it the best weekly published to-day. Whenever I pick up a copy I know that there is a treat in store for me. It contains the best stories published, and I think that the publishers deserve a vote of thanks for the fine stories about Ted Strong which they give us every week. WILLIAM HASKINS.

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When a person has once read a number of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY he becomes a steady reader of the publication.

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Albany, N. Y.

These stories have made a lasting impression upon you.

I do not know of any boys' paper that can come up [illegible] fine weekly. The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY cannot be b[illegible] is saying a whole lot when one stops to think that there [illegible] many other papers on the market. But I have read a[illegible] the other ones, and feel that I am in a position to [illegible] all. So when I say that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY [illegible] you know that I mean it. KIT C. VANE.

Williamsburg, N. Y.

It is a pleasure to receive a letter which expresses so much liking for the famous ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. You are a close student of other weeklies, and know the good from the [illegible] In picking out the [illegible] which contains the wonderful Ted Strong stories you have shown good judgment.

When I [illegible] the other boys writing to the Chat column, I don't hold in any [illegible] I had to [illegible] the best weekly in the world. I [illegible] story in the ROUGH RIDER [illegible] which [illegible] If the stories had [illegible] interesting, you can j[illegible] that I wouldn't [illegible] it is all true, I am gl[illegible] to send [illegible] opinion of them. [illegible] S. W. M[illegible]

Boston, Mass.

You have shown a frankness in your criticism which indicates that you are not the kind that are apt to indulge in any false statements. It must be that you are an admirer of Ted Strong, and try to live up to his principles.

I go to the post-office every week in a small New Jersey town to get my copy of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and [illegible] day that it is due, [illegible] this is true. I [illegible] not doubt it, for what would be the use of my writing and telling you, if it were not true? I just want to let you know that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY appeals to me to such an extent that I am ready to go after it the moment I know that it is within reach. Doesn't this show that I really think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the greatest boys' paper in the world? HENRY GALWAY.

St. Louis, Mo.

What made you think that we would doubt your word, Henry? Our attitude toward you is far from that. You are one of our most sincere admirers, and deserve to be complimented for the fidelity you show in going to the post-office for your library, regardless of the conditions of the weather. We suppose that the reason you go for it on a rainy day, as well as a clear day, is that you know that, after getting home and beginning the story, it will cheer you up so that you will not notice how disagreeable the weather really is.

Well, the season at Coney Island is over, and I have been in the city for the last few weeks with nothing to do but read my ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. Your paper I have read ever since the first number appeared. During the last summer I have been working down on the old historic street known as "Coney Island's Bowery." I had a concession there, and was making

[illegible] reading [illegible] if I had already [illegible] found out [illegible] ever again with-[illegible]

Q. D. S. B.

[illegible] y occupa-[illegible] time to [illegible] time to [illegible] not coin-[illegible] thing to occupy their time. And [illegible] ROUGH RIDER [illegible] of the Wild [illegible] better publication devoted to [illegible] the ROUGH RIDER [illegible]

[illegible] ROUGH RIDER [illegible] course, the [illegible] posed to [illegible] yours—[illegible] it so well [illegible] to drop [illegible] it.

S. A. M[illegible]

[illegible] the most [illegible]

[illegible] of Ted Strong [illegible] n boy should [illegible] s willing to help [illegible] that Ted must have [illegible] is a Western lad, [illegible] A Southern man or boy is [illegible] polite and attentive to [illegible] this kind of a young [illegible] and thinks that he is [illegible] I would try to be [illegible] I have taken him a[illegible] and am trying to be [illegible] that every [illegible]

[illegible] D. Watts.

[illegible] Ga.

[illegible] the chivalrous trait that Ted displays [illegible] fair sex. Of course, being a Southern [illegible] Your sister probably noticed this before [illegible] a boy to observe these things.

Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, is my idol. He has [illegible] I could [illegible] I can't [illegible] this, there [illegible] There is [illegible] ude in the [illegible] American [illegible] person [illegible] enough to do the same thing.

[illegible] Frazier.

Troy, N. Y.

[illegible] Like Ted Strong if you [illegible] never does [illegible] to do is [illegible] speak the truth, because you know that Ted Strong [illegible] speaks the truth; never take anything that belongs to another, because you know that Ted Strong would scorn to commit theft; [illegible] to help others, because you know that Ted Strong never [illegible] to assist those who are in distress: always treat everybody you come in contact with—especially [illegible] the greatest respect, for you know [illegible] the King of the Wild West does. But [illegible] as you admire Ted so much, and realize that he is the model, not only for yourself, but for every boy to follow.

Ted Strong is well named the King of the Wild West. He [illegible] he has made war upon the bandits, [illegible] error among them. Ted never lets one of [illegible] try to make way with [illegible] ys able to outdo them. He [illegible] his revolver pointed in their direc-[illegible] chance to draw a pistol. They are [illegible] at times, but they are not as quick as Ted. I do not know [illegible] any border hero who was able to draw his gun the way [illegible] does. It's just wonderful how he manages to do the things he does.

FRANK C. MASON.

Pittsburg, Pa.

There has never been a person famous in border history who could draw a revolver quicker than Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West. He is a regular whirlwind when it comes to things of this kind. It wouldn't be advisable for any one to try conclusions with Ted with either bowie-knife or gun.

There is something about the name "Ted Strong" which implies that the young man bearing it can always take care of himself, no matter what happens. He is well named, and there is no mistake about that. I would like to meet this noble young fellow, he is such a fine chap.

A. W. E. FELLOWS.

Detroit, Mich.

Ted's name indicates the kind of young man he is, just as you say. He has always been able to take care of himself, and has shown that his mere name mentioned in a bad locality keeps the rough element in subjection as well as if there were a whole squad of soldiers standing near-by with drawn weapons.

If Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, ever comes to this city, I want to meet him. He has been my ideal of what a Western young man should be, and I would like to see that ideal realized in flesh and blood.

I have heard from friends who live out in that country that his very name strikes terror to the hearts of the cattle-rustlers. They say that if Ted is within ten miles of the locality where the thieves are intending to make a raid, that they give up all idea of carrying out their plans until they hear that he has got farther away.

SAMUEL SMITH.

Lynn, Mass.

Ted has had so many brushes with the cattle-rustlers of the West, and put so many of them in prison, that they are afraid of him. They do not dare carry out any of their villainous purposes until they feel sure that the King of the Wild West is far away from their neighborhood.

I have been reading that king of weeklies, the ROUGH RIDER. It has no equal, and should be read by every boy in America. Every person who now reads it and likes it—and who does not?—should make it a point to tell all his friends what a wonderful paper it is, so that they will get in the habit of reading it, too. I have obtained twenty-five new readers already, and hope to get more before the month is over.

GEORGE N. WESTERFIELD.

Ontario, Canada.

That is a good suggestion, and we hope that our readers will act upon it. Whenever any of us like a thing, we generally recommend it to our friends, so that they can enjoy it as well as ourselves. Many of our new subscribers say that they had the library brought to their attention by some friend who had read it and liked it so well that he felt that he would be doing his friend an injustice if he did not speak of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY and its attractive qualities.

COME, BOYS, GET BUSY!

Grand Letter Competition

$100 in Gold Awarded for the Best Letters from Readers of ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Every one of the 50,000 boys who read the excellent stories of Western adventure published in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, has some special reason for liking them. One may like the covers; another thinks Ted Strong is just it; another may buy it because he thinks Stella, as a girl pard, cannot be beat.

Now, we intend to make it worth the while of every boy to tell us just what he thinks about the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY and hereby offer valuable prizes to those who write us the best letters regarding the stories themselves; how you may have worked to increase their circulation or what you know about the fascinating life of the modern ranchman, so ably described by our cowboy author, Mr. Ned Taylor. We would particularly appreciate receiving letters from our Western friends.

Do not hesitate about writing; although you may not be so fortunate as to come in for the cash, every contestant will receive a valuable consolation prize.

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$10.00 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$5.00 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
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The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition, care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump right in and resolve to win a cash prize.

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